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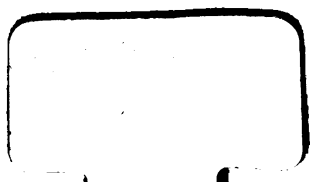
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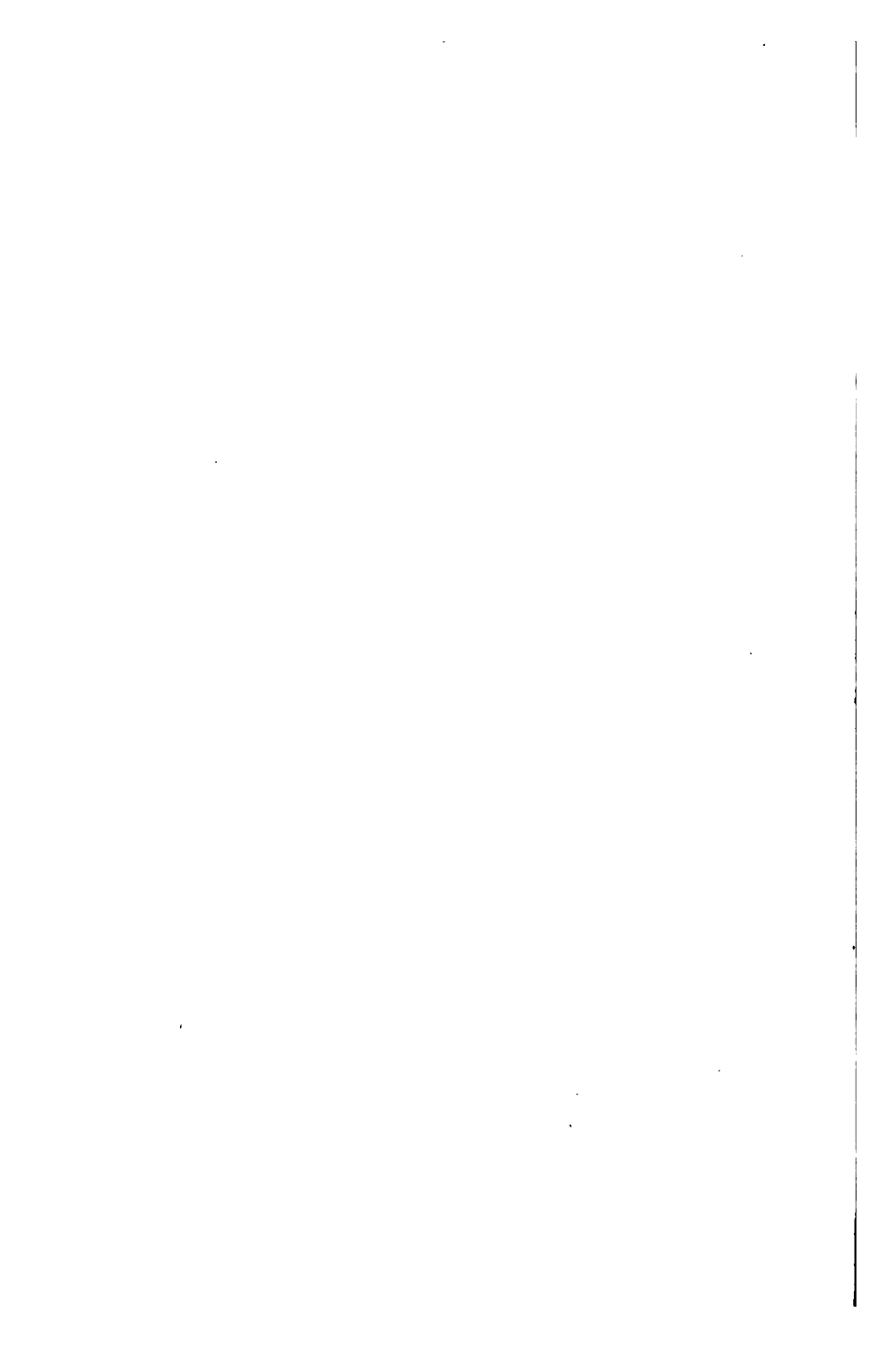
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THE JESUIT

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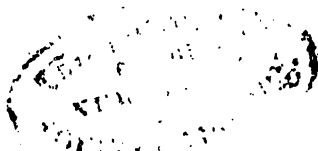


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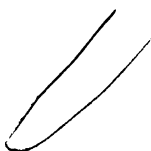
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CONTENTS

	PAGE
Chapter I.....	I
Chapter II.....	14
Chapter III.....	19
Chapter IV.....	33
Chapter V.....	40
Chapter VI.....	50
Chapter VII.....	60
Chapter VIII.....	71
Chapter IX.....	86
Chapter X.....	102
Chapter XI.....	112
Chapter XII.....	126
Chapter XIII.....	139
Chapter XIV.....	153
Chapter XV.....	173
Chapter XVI.....	187
Chapter XVII.....	192
Chapter XVIII.....	205
Chapter XIX.....	216
Chapter XX.....	234
Chapter XXI.....	243
Chapter XXII.....	253
Chapter XXIII.....	266
Chapter XXIV.....	272

c 77



CHAPTER I

IT was the time of the vintage in Rome. Grapes hung in full purple clusters in the vineyards around the villas on the Roman Campagna, where clouds chased each other to and fro, tossed by the light breezes of late September, and cast fitful shadows on the withered grass of the wide fields.

In a garden belonging to a monastery on one of the Seven Hills from which Rome surveyed the world long years ago, and proclaimed herself mistress, the terraced rows of grapevines were laden with luscious fruit. A Franciscan monk, in coarse, brown garb, was perched on the top of a ladder in the middle of one of the straight avenues, covered by trellises through which the afternoon sun sifted gaily. Leaning comfortably against the wooden railing, the monk cut off the clusters of fruit with his long scissors, and dropped them into a basket fastened to his ladder. This he did with the utmost care, so that he should not mar their beauty nor injure their symmetry. Being a lover of the lovely in nature or art, Brother Antonio detested imperfection in anything. He lifted an especially fine cluster and held it out into a broad band of sunlight, that he might thoroughly enjoy its rich purple color, the faint down upon the grapes, and the regular form of the fruit.

THE JESUIT

"Fit for the gods!" he exclaimed aloud. "On this very spot, two thousand years ago, Pan would have plucked thee and eaten thee, while his pipe lay idle yonder against the gnarled trunk of some gray tree."

"You old heathen! Talking about the ancient gods of Rome here in the heart of modern civilization," interrupted a fresh, clear voice.

As calmly as if he had not been startled by this sudden interruption to his train of thought, Fra Antonio gently laid the bunch of grapes in the basket beside its fellows, and, parting the large leaves of the vine which so closely covered the trellises, looked down into the eager young face which was upturned toward him.

"What dost thou want?" he asked, gruffly, though his eyes twinkled. "Is not this thine hour in the infirmary?"

"As I am so soon to leave the Monastery, I am released from that duty. Brother Anselmo takes my place, at his own request. Throw me down a bunch of grapes, please, good Brother Antonio."

"'Good Brother Antonio!'" mocked the old monk. Apparently moved by the appeal, Fra Antonio selected the smallest of the clusters still left hanging on the vine and dropped it into the slender white hands extended to receive it.

"Um-m!" responded the voice below. "If you cannot do better for me than this, I shall help myself."

THE JESUIT

So saying, he stretched his strongly built figure higher and broke off the fruit which he desired, remaining deaf to the remonstrances of the monk on the ladder, who had now thrown back his hood and stood plainly disclosed to view. His scant hair, around the shaven crown, was quite gray; his features were rugged, browned from exposure to the sunshine of the south. His eyes were brown and singularly lustrous, and his mouth was wide, thin-lipped, yet kindly.

"The baby of the Monastery!" he remarked, satirically.

"Precisely so. The grapes are excellent, thank you, Brother Antonio." He drew nearer to the ladder. "Do you know when Padre Veroni will return?"

The question was put in a half-whisper, and the old monk replied with the same caution, and with a total change of expression, as he leaned down from his perch.

"In a few days, I believe. Personally, I have not heard anything from him since he left Rome. Fra Antonio is too humble a being for him to remember. But this morning, as I was passing through the long corridor, I heard our Superior say, 'Yes, Padre Veroni is due at Naples today and will soon come to Rome.'"

"Today!"

"Precisely."

There was a leer of curiosity on Fra Antonio's

THE JESUIT

face and a catlike stealthiness in his voice as he said: "I wonder that thou comest to me for information. Thou wast ever his pet and favorite among us all. Whatever the rest of us might do, Paolo could do no wrong; Paolo was perfect and beyond reproach."

"Don't, Brother Antonio!" pleaded Don Paolo, reaching up to grasp the horny hand upon the ladder.

Fra Antonio's expression softened. "I ask thy pardon, boy," he responded, shortly. "Thou knowest that I love thee—we all do—but sometimes things hurt, especially when one grows old and white-haired. Satisfy my curiosity. Why is it that thou, who wast once so dear to Padre Veroni, has fallen into disfavor? Has he never written to thee?"

"Once only. Addio, Brother Antonio," and before the monk could protest Don Paolo was away, his black robes mingling with the dark vines and the neutral tints of the tree trunks.

Fra Antonio returned to his work. "I might have known that he would not tell me," he muttered. "A more close-mouthed lad never came to this Monastery in all the years I've been here. And yet I've loved the boy—who could help it? What could have caused the trouble between them? Padre Veroni educated him, spent hours with him every day, taught him, if I may be forgiven for speaking after the manner of the world, taught him the

THE JESUIT

secrets of the trade; and of secrets the good father knows not a few; petted him, spoiled him. And, behold, a year ago he goes off to America without bidding his favorite good-by, and does not unbend enough even to let him know when he intends to return. Verily, this is a queer world, a very queer world."

Shaking his tonsured head sadly at the peculiarities of human beings, Fra Antonio fastened up his brown gown that he might not trip on it, descended the ladder slowly, and carried his basket of purple grapes to the kitchen of the Monastery, reserving for himself the one perfect cluster which he had so greatly admired.

Frou-Frou, the green parrot with a red crest, hooted at him from his post on the branch just outside the kitchen door, and croaked out a hoarse "Buon giorno," in return for which greeting Fra Antonio threw the bird a grape, which it caught deftly in its hooked beak. Paying no attention to the request for more, the monk drew his brown robe closely around him and went away to his cell.

Don Paolo passed out from beneath the arch of shadow formed by the grape arbor and went on through the garden, between ilex trees of extreme age, twisted and gnarled by the ravages of time and weather, between rose trees on which a few belated roses of summer still lingered, or, falling to pieces at the slight jar of his footsteps, dropped fragrant petals on the well-worn path. Finding

THE JESUIT

his way through flowers and trees, past bubbling, laughing fountains he went, until he came to a wall half-hidden under an ivy vine, a stocky growth of a century or more. Leaning his elbows on the wall, he feasted his eyes on the scene spread out before him: on Rome, with her towers and domes, her palaces, her hovels, her beauty, and her wickedness. Far beneath flowed the river Tiber, sluggishly moving, like a mighty animal, toward her goal, the gay, blue Mediterranean. Sitting down, at last, on an old stone bench near by, the young priest became absorbed in a book which he drew from beneath his gown. So interested was he that he did not notice the approaching footsteps, and lifted his eyes with a dazed expression as a shadow fell across the white page. Startled at the unexpected presence of the Superior he sprang to his feet, and for an instant aroused to a sense of fear, he made an effort to conceal the book which he had been reading. Then throwing back his head, he boldly faced the stern man, who looked straight into his eyes.

When the Superior spoke his tone was cool and smooth, with that quality in it which suggests highly tempered steel, capable of cutting keenly, deeply, direct to the heart.

"Don Paolo is growing more literary in his tastes. I loved him better when he spent more time on his knees in the chapel, and fewer hours in company with heretical authors who poison the mind and pervert the imagination. This company

THE JESUIT

which he loves drives him to seek secluded, sheltered places, where he may enjoy their society without fear of interruption.

The steel cut deep, indeed, into the soul of the priest. Don Paolo drew a deep breath, turned pale and trembled. It was no small matter to be accused of heresy by the Abbot of one of the largest monasteries in Rome, a monastery where he had passed almost all his life. It might mean a great deal to a priest just entering on his career, as he was going out into the world to make a name for himself. A bishopric, or even a cardinal's hat may loom up in a vision before the mind of a man beginning the life of the active priesthood, and Don Paolo knew that he felt within him the germs of a powerful ambition. The disapproval of the Abbot could easily bring to him loss of position, of confidence, of all that was dear to him, all that could help him in the future which lay before him, bright and alluring. A taint of heresy would ruin all, and Paolo Gregori was but a man, in spite of his priestly garb, a man with ambitions and hopes. No wonder that he trembled in the presence of one who held his future in his power as one holds a precious glass bauble which may be dashed at will into a thousand pieces. Yet there were other things to be considered. The young priest's mind had long been agitated on other questions. How far was it right for a man to be enslaved to his religion? To what extent is a man a free agent? These thoughts flashed like

THE JESUIT

lightning through his mind, but from force of habit he lowered his glance submissively.

"What art thou reading?"

He meekly handed the parchment-covered volume to the Superior.

"Renan, eh? Well, it might be worse. All young men go through these years of uncertainty and doubt. They have the disease as sure as they suffer in childhood from measles and whooping cough." He smiled dryly.

Don Paolo bowed. "Tell me," he said, forgetting the difference between the Abbot and himself, "tell me, what is truth? Where can I find it? I seek it in prayer, and cannot find it. I say mass before the altar, and my heart is not enlightened. There must be truth, divine truth, somewhere! Help me to find it!"

It was the bitter cry of a soul longing for the light, a cry uttered ages before, echoing back and forth in the darkness of human life and suffering. It touched even the narrow consciousness of the Abbot. He laid his hand kindly on the young man's shoulder.

"It is an old question, boy. Thousands of men have sought to solve it."

"And have they always failed?"

There was no avoiding the earnest glance of those eyes which held his so potently.

"These matters are fortunately not in our hands. The Church, our mother, has decided all questions

THE JESUIT

according to the wisdom of the fathers. Our responsibility ends there. We can rest quietly, trusting to the wisdom of those who are wiser than we are," he replied, smoothly. The judgment of the Church had always been sufficient for him. Why should it not be for this priest, so young and inexperienced?

Don Paolo clenched his hands tightly. The Church! Since his childhood he had relied on her for his soul's salvation. He felt within him the stirring of an independent nature; he wanted to know for himself.

"Doesn't *God* know?" he whispered, with intensity.

The Abbot shivered in spite of his strong will and his habitual self-control. "Thou art nervous and overwrought," he said, kindly. "We will discuss this at another time. Padre Veroni will be here tomorrow," he added, irrelevantly.

"So I have heard."

"Has he written to thee?"

"One letter has come to me during his absence, and that referred only to some business matters which were in my hands. It is evident that he is still angry with me for daring to cross his will. I am very sorry, but it cannot be helped."

The two men still stood by the ivy-covered wall, as they had stood ever since the beginning of their unusual conversation. The sun was setting gloriously. The figure of the priest in his black

THE JESUIT

gown, assumed but a short time before, was silhouetted against the rose color in the heavens. Susceptible in his very soul to the influence of nature, Don Paolo breathed heavily as he watched the constant changes in the ever-varying masses of clouds, the quick transformation from rose to blood-red, and again to brilliant saffron, from purple to dull gray, while the delicate blue of the sky altered to pale green and lemon, as the ball of fire sank suddenly to rest. All the time the question he had asked repeated itself in his brain. Doesn't God know where a man may find truth? He who made the soul, who fashioned the mind, who endowed his creation with the power to think and reason, could he not hold communion with that which belonged to himself by birthright? If he revealed his mysteries to the fathers of the Church ages before, why not reveal them to men of this later age? Had not a man the power to decide some things as an individual? Conscious of his doubts and rebellious feelings toward a system which had regulated his actions and thoughts ever since he could remember, he watched the last glow of the rose and flame die away.

The Abbot paid little attention to the sunset: his thoughts were concentrated on the man beside him. As a boy of ten, he had come to the Monastery to study; there he had remained all through his youth. It could not be possible that now, just as he arrived at manhood, when a brilliant career lay be-

THE JESUIT

fore him, he would be drawn away from the faith by strange doctrines and heresies. The Abbot was a man of experience and knew men well. He could perceive the signs of unrest and mental disturbance. A feeling of desire to be independent of the Church, to act for himself, to judge for himself—these were symptoms of that graver disease, heresy. Padre Veroni had noticed these signs in Don Paolo before he left Rome. Knowing how the boy loved and respected him, the shrewd Jesuit priest had tried to rebuke him by withdrawing his affection and appearing to neglect his protégé. Well, tomorrow, Padre Veroni would come. He was wise in the ways of the world and would know how to act. Don Paolo was talented, highly educated, and with unusual gifts in speech. He must not be lost to the Church.

“Thou wilt remain for supper,” said the Superior, as they walked toward the Monastery in the purple shadows of twilight, which falls so suddenly in southern lands.

The Abbot entered the long refectory on the ground floor, and passed between the lines of monks to his special place at the end of the room. Large lamps shed a mellow glow over a scene which was more than picturesque. A high vaulted ceiling, bare whitewashed walls, relieved only by two paintings of saints conspicuous in the calendar, long tables ranged beneath the iron-barred windows, and the monks gowned in brown cloth, with cords

THE JESUIT

around their waists, rosaries at their sides, and with tonsured heads, standing, quietly waiting—this was the picture presented by the refectory which had been used by the Franciscans for two hundred years and more. It was a fast day, and Don Paolo knelt on the stone floor near Fra Antonio, while he ate the lentil soup and drank a portion of sour, red wine. Immediately after the completion of the simple meal, the priest passed with the monks into the chapel, kneeling down in the shadow of a tall pillar.

The few candles on the altar accentuated the gloom of the evening. The voice of the Abbot and the responses of the monks echoed back hollowly from the arches above. Don Paolo joined mechanically in the responses, but his soul was deeply moved. He was no longer satisfied with the doctrines of the Church; he was a seeker after truth, reaching out blindly to grasp a guiding hand. Feeling helpless and alone, he bent forward until his forehead touched the mosaic of the pavement. A less conscientious man would have dismissed the doubts and fears; Don Paolo could not do this and retain his self-respect. Yet he knew that although the Abbot might be kind to him, he was already regarded with suspicion; and suspicion meant distrust and danger. It was as if a dark pit opened before him, a pit of disgrace and suffering. Knowing this, he still sought to learn more of divine truth. In what way would God disclose it to him?

THE JESUIT

Later he went to the reception room of the Superior. "At what time will Padre Veroni return tomorrow?" he inquired.

The Abbot reread the telegram which lay on the desk in front of him. "At 2:10, by the express from Naples. It would be well if thou shouldst go to the station to meet him."

"I will do so," Don Paolo replied, quietly.

CHAPTER II

THE Lapeers had met Padre Veroni on the steamer, soon after they sailed from New York for Naples. By the time they were safely seated on the express train which carried them swiftly toward the city of the Cæsars the awe which they had felt—particularly Mrs. Lapeer—in being in daily contact with a real priest of the Roman Catholic Church had perceptibly diminished. Having lived all her life in a strictly Protestant circle, her only knowledge of that Church being through her servants who went frequently to mass and attended confession with praiseworthy regularity, Mrs. Lapeer had felt considerable constraint at first in the presence of the tall priest.

Padre Veroni occupied the seat on the right of the captain, and as Fay Lapeer sat next to him, and Mrs. Lapeer and Janet occupied the opposite places, it was inevitable that acquaintance should ripen as a tropical plant grows in the sunshine—with extraordinary rapidity.

When Padre Veroni decided that he would go to Rome on the very train which the Lapeers had selected, there was general rejoicing. Fay confided to Janet that there was no one who could give so much information or prove so entertaining as the priest, and that she considered him “perfectly

THE JESUIT

lovely," an opinion which amused Janet greatly and would have afforded Father Veroni much entertainment, had he heard it, for special reasons of his own.

"Yonder you can see Saint Peter's," said Padre Veroni, pointing out the blue-gray dome which stood clearly defined against a cloudless sky.

"It doesn't look very large," suggested Fay Lapeer.

Padre Veroni smiled as he looked down into her bright face. The girl was of good height, but the priest towered above her, his stature accentuated by the straight lines of his black cassock.

"It marks the greatest and holiest spot in Rome," he replied, "and it is and ever will be the center around which the life of the city and of the world circles, a center for Catholics and Protestants alike. Beneath that dome Saint Peter's body rests, and near there our Holy Father lives; from that spot go forth influences which mold the world, which control and guide the movements of nations, the decision of kings."

It was dramatic, and yet, though he spoke with warmth, the priest showed no visible excitement. Although an Italian, his command of the English tongue was almost perfect, much of his life having passed in countries under English domination. A very slight accent, a rolling of the "r" or a broad fullness given to a vowel, only added to his general attractiveness.

THE JESUIT

"I thought it had never been proved that Saint Peter was in Rome," responded Janet's calm voice. Fay said that there were times when Janet's calmness ceased to be a virtue and became exasperating. This was one of the times, evidently, for Padre Veroni's face flushed slightly.

"I was not aware that the matter was open to discussion, since Saint Peter was the first Bishop of Rome," the priest replied, blandly.

There was a painful pause. Janet bit her lip to keep back the impetuous words.

"Saint Peter's is the largest church in the world, I understand," Mrs. Lapeer said, with a timid attempt to relieve the situation.

A gleam of amusement lighted the priest's black eyes and the tense expression which his own words and those of Janet had brought to his face vanished.

"You will find the measurement of the various cathedrals which are noted for their size marked on the pavement of Saint Peter's, Mrs. Lapeer," he responded, courteously. "It has always been a unique fact that you Americans think more about size than beauty or historical interest," he continued, but noticing that Mrs. Lapeer was annoyed by this criticism, he quickly added, with that tact which so characterized Padre Veroni, and so fascinated those who came in contact with him: "This is not to be wondered at when one considers the immense prosperity and extent of your beautiful land."

THE JESUIT

"We are coming into the station!" exclaimed Fay, eagerly.

Very soon the party of three ladies, followed by the priest, left the train with the busiling, hurrying crowd, and were hospitably welcomed by the porter of the hotel-pension, where they had reserved rooms.

As they passed out of the long station a young priest emerged from a throng of persons who were waiting at the entrance and, to the astonishment of Janet, lingering behind her mother and Fay, respectfully removed his broad-brimmed beaver hat and kissed the thin white hand held out to him by Padre Veroni.

Since entering Rome Padre Veroni seemed to be a different man. The customs and manners of his people enveloped him as with a garment. Only a few hours before he had been Americanized, Anglicized. Now he became Italian, polite, and ceremonial to the last degree. Janet marveled at the change, which her mother and Fay did not notice, being too much interested in the objects of interest pointed out by him: the splendid fountain, at whose dedication Pope Pius IX made his last public appearance, "before he entered his prison, the Vatican," the priest explained; the magnificent ruins of the once stately Baths of Diocletian, where five thousand Romans could luxuriously bathe at one time; the palace of Queen Margherita, the mother of Victor Emmanuel, king of Italy, "a gracious lady, who was as good a Catholic as her husband, King

THE JESUIT

Humbert, had been a bad one," commented the priest.

Janet was too inexperienced to know that even the air of Rome is full of mystery, of subtle changes and weird influences which alter the character and point of view of those who yield themselves to it as surely and as quietly as the waves of the sea modify the coast line of a country. Rome, the mysterious, the wonderful, casts her fascination over native and foreigner alike, often entangling their minds and even souls in a web so filmy, so gauzy, that one does not realize his bondage until he is caught tightly in the threads.



CHAPTER III

THE Speranza was a pension of high grade and price. Padre Veroni would not have recommended it to Mrs. Lapeer if he had not first adroitly drawn from her information which assured him that she was fully able to pay well for comfort and even luxury. The evenings spent on the deck with these ladies had been fruitful, for Mrs. Lapeer was guileless and confiding. Before the steamer was three days out from New York the priest was in possession of facts which were of interest to him. Padre Veroni was a priest and, furthermore, a member of the Society of Jesus, that organization which has made and unmade kingdoms, whose power is felt, not seen, which rules with a rod of iron, which commands and its members must obey. He had been trained in a school which produces men who are astute, keen in their judgment of persons, ready to turn everything to the advantage of the Church whose interests they are bound to protect. Having been taught that the end justifies the means, Padre Veroni thought it no harm to induce Mrs. Lapeer to open her mind to him, to allow him, entirely without her own volition, to probe the depths of her soul.

He had learned of her childhood, surrounded by the protection of loving parents; of her marriage

THE JESUIT

to a man who humored every whim; of the fortune which her father left her, and her lucky speculation in Chicago property; of her husband's sudden death, whereby she was left mistress of a large amount of money, diminished only by legacies to Janet and Fay which made them independent. He learned of the advantageous offers of marriage which both girls had already received and refused, and he ascertained how deeply Mrs. Lapeer longed to have them marry into distinguished and even titled families. Her love for them, sincere and unselfish, bred visions of dukes and princes on their knees, offering coronets to her daughters.

It was after one of these conversations, during which neither Janet nor Fay had been present, that Padre Veroni paced the deck for an hour, deep in thought, and decided that this was a case where presentation to the "Holy Father" would be desirable, together with the gift of tickets to the coming celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of Pius IX's promulgation of that new dogma, the "Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary." Mrs. Lapeer's soul might be benefited thereby. To be sure, she had informed him that they were all members in good and regular standing in a prominent Protestant church in Clyde, near Chicago, where their country home was; but he had assured her that it would be a pleasure, really, a pleasure, to assist her in seeing something of the inner life of the Church in Rome. He hinted that he knew a cardinal and one

THE JESUIT

or two archbishops who were equally impartial in their views, and Mrs. Lapeer had glowed with pride when he suggested that an introduction from him would open the doors of the palaces of the "Blacks," or clerical circles, to her beautiful daughters. When Padre Veroni mentioned the Speranza as a pension which was eminently respectable, on the verge of aristocracy, where a lady could receive visitors who frequented the inner and most sacred circles of Roman society, Mrs. Lapeer at once resolved to secure rooms there.

It occurred to her, later, that Padre Veroni had not intimated that he, too, would be a guest here, and she was, consequently, surprised to see him seated at a small table alone. At the close of dinner the priest joined them and guided them into a drawing room, brilliantly lighted by electric bulbs in an old Venetian glass chandelier, a combination which impressed Janet as peculiar and not pleasing.

"They ought to have candles in," she said, intending to speak to Fay, whom she supposed to be near her.

"I quite agree with you," said a melodious voice at her side, and she turned to face a woman, not much older than herself, dressed in the somber garb of a widow. "Very poor taste," continued the stranger, "but it is typical of a land where ancient ruins stand shoulder to shoulder with modern buildings, and where one stumbles upon interesting

THE JESUIT

statues in the most incongruous places. O, Padre Veroni, I am delighted to see you back in old Rome!"

The priest smiled as she extended to him an unusually small and beautifully formed hand, which he grasped cordially.

"The pleasure is mine, Lady Eger. Is it not rather early for you to be in our city?"

"Yes, I am a month ahead of my usual time, but Rome draws me; I cannot stay away."

Lady Eger lowered her voice as she spoke, and the priest replied, sympathetically: "I understand—I understand. People cannot remain far from Rome when they have once felt her fascination; and if foreigners are so affected by it, can you not imagine how we feel, we who are so fortunate as to possess her for our birthright?"

Scarcely realizing why she did so, Janet had lingered near and had listened to the conversation. Overcome by a sense of her rudeness, for she saw that the priest and the lady were old friends, she would have moved away. Padre Veroni detained her by a touch on the arm.

"Lady Eger, I want to present to you a young American lady, Miss Janet Lapeer, from Chicago, a fellow-passenger of mine on the Arcania, together with her mother and sister."

"They are the two standing yonder by the table, are they not? The beautiful girl in white is your sister? I have already exchanged views with

THE JESUIT

Miss Lapeer on the subject of that tasteless combination of Venetian work of art and our gray electric illumination. I foresee that I shall like Miss Lapeer, if we begin by disliking the same things."

Padre Veroni joined some acquaintances who claimed his attention, and Lady Eger continued, vivaciously: "Let us sit down here in these two easy chairs and be comfortable. Would you like a cup of coffee? Yes? I thought so. Giovanni, bring two coffees—or perhaps your mother and sister will join us—Giovanni, four coffees! Mind you bring it strong!"

Janet was dazed and scarcely caught her breath before she found herself presenting her mother and Fay to this voluble but charming stranger. Her equilibrium returned with her feeling of amusement when she noticed the look of awe with which her mother regarded Lady Eger. Mrs. Lapeer's head swam a little. Was Lady Eger a baroness, or a countess, or what? Should one call her "My lady," or would that savor too much of "below stairs"? A woman of good sense and refinement rarely fails to do the proper thing if she stops to think, and Mrs. Lapeer very wisely decided to call her "Lady Eger" and keep on the safe side.

"Sugar, Mrs. Lapeer? Two lumps or three? I take three, for it is so bitter and strong. I think Padre Veroni told me that you come from Chicago.

THE JESUIT

I had a brother who went to America seven or eight years ago—Sir John Hamilton. You don't remember ever meeting him, do you?"

"No, I do not," Mrs. Lapeer roused herself sufficiently to remark. "I do not remember ever meeting Sir John Hamilton."

"Well, possibly it was not Chicago he went to. He bought a ranch somewhere out there," she replied with pleasing vagueness.

"There are no ranches in Chicago, or near it," began the irrepressible Fay, her eyes dancing with fun, but Lady Eger did not stop to listen. She had kept a careful watch on Padre Veroni's movements, and seeing that he had risen to leave the room, she excused herself to Mrs. Lapeer, saying that she would see her in the morning, and walked away to join the priest.

A few minutes later, when the three ladies passed out into the hall on their way upstairs, they saw her in a small library leaning forward eagerly, her piquant face illuminated by a circle of light from a shaded electric light on an onyx table. Opposite her was Padre Veroni. They were so engrossed in conversation that they did not notice the rustle of skirts as the Lapeers passed by.

It was about nine o'clock the next morning that Janet entered the drawing room, seeking for a quiet corner where she could study her Bædeker and lay out a plan for the day's sight-seeing. She started back in surprise for Padre Veroni stood by

THE JESUIT

the window talking with the priest who had met him at the station.

"I will go up now and get it," she heard him say. "Ah, Miss Lapeer, good morning! I hope you rested well on your first night in Rome."

"Very nicely, thank you."

Padre Veroni passed out of the door. Then, as if moved by a sudden impulse, he returned and motioned to the priest who still stood at the window.

"Paolo, come here. Miss Lapeer, you desire to know our people as well as our ruins." (How well he had gauged her character.) "Allow me to introduce Don Paolo Gregori, canon of one of our best churches."

For the first time in her life Janet found herself in a peculiar position. A young man, a priest, was waiting for her to say something, and she did not know how to begin! How did one talk to a priest? On theism? To be sure, Padre Veroni had been both priest and Italian, but he was older and had taken the initiative.

Don Paolo did not appear to be embarrassed, for he was looking at her with an expression of curiosity. But why did he not say something?

"Do you speak English?" she finally ventured, in desperation.

"No, mademoiselle. I can read your language, but have never had an opportunity to speak. If you do not object to speak in French—"

THE JESUIT

There was in his manner an odd hesitancy and diffidence which set Janet at her ease.

It was fortunate for Janet that a French governess had guided her in the intricate paths of verbs and crooked adjectives, so that she could reply without embarrassment in that language. Notwithstanding the fact that Don Paolo's acquaintance with women had been very slight, his life having been passed in a monastery and college for priests, he felt no fear in conversing with an American girl. He regarded her in the light of a novelty, a strange being from another land, from that country across the sea where so many bizarre actions were constantly reported in the daily papers, where women ruled and men worked to keep them in pretty clothes.

"Mademoiselle is an American?" he said, tentatively.

"Yes. Have you been in America?"

"Alas, no. It has never been my good fortune to visit your great country.

Janet smiled with national pride which was soon to have a fall.

"Great in extent of territory, in resources, and in wealth, but not so great as Italia is," he continued quietly. "No land on the face of the earth has what we have had for centuries, a grand history. From us has gone forth the best in art, science, and literature. Look at Michelangelo, Raphael, and Dante; and, even in modern times, at the inventors

THE JESUIT

and scientists, most of whom are Italians. Ah! we have reason to be proud."

Janet gasped at this eloquence. The priest could talk and talk well.

"I never thought of that," she remarked, ashamed to tell him how little she knew of Roman history, how the emperors were not realities to her but names to be learned. Not for worlds would she have let him know that, until she met Padre Veroni, she had supposed that all Italians were like those who dug the ditches and laid the railroad ties in her native land. It was unpardonable ignorance and she blushed with shame.

"And in religion," Don Paolo went on, now quite warmed up to his subject, and forgetting that he was talking to that enigma of modern civilization, the American girl of the period, "in religion, Italy has been the mother. From the steps of the Church of Saint Gregory, down yonder by the Arch of Constantine, Gregory the Great sent the monk Augustine forth, with a little band of barefoot companions, to evangelize England, a barbarous country where men were subject to Druid priests and human sacrifices were made to their gods."

Don Paolo's hands moved nervously and, in his enthusiasm, his face was lighted and his eyes flashed. Well had Don Paolo earned the title "Silver tongue" from his fellow students!

"And from England it came across the seas to us," rejoined Janet, aroused in her turn. "But—

THE JESUIT

but—England is Protestant, and so is America. If your Pope sent us the gospel, how is it that we are not Catholic today?”

Don Paolo hesitated.

“Is mademoiselle a Protestant? Ah, then it is well that we do not discuss the question. From my standpoint, I might say something to hurt mademoiselle’s feelings. Yet, if you allow it, it would afford me much pleasure if, one day, I might hear from you some facts concerning the Protestant religion, as it is today. I am interested,” he added, hurriedly, for Padre Veroni approached them.

A few minutes later Janet stood at the window and watched the two priests walking down the street beneath the shadow of the sycamore trees. Both were tall, the older man austere in his appearance, the younger slender and graceful, in spite of the disfiguring robes held in by a broad black sash. On the other side of the street were at least a dozen men in scarlet gowns, with black hats, and a dozen more followed a little distance behind them, and still another squad, all hastening along with books under their arms.

“Like birds of paradise, aren’t they?” remarked Lady Eger. “Did I startle you by coming in so quietly? I beg your pardon, I coughed, but you did not hear me. No scene in Rome is complete without some of those scarlet students in it. One comes across them everywhere, on the Pincio, on

THE JESUIT

the Corso, playing ball in the Villa Borghese, and they always add just the desirable touch of color."

"What a lot of priests one sees here! There go some more, but they have black on, with blue sashes."

"Rome would not be Rome without the priests. Those scarlet students are from the famous German college. You will see where they live some day. You have been talking with Don Paolo, Miss Lapeer. Sometime you must tell me what you think of him. He is a great favorite of mine."

"How did she know I was talking to Don Paolo?" queried Janet, mentally. "She was not here."

"Good morning, Mrs. Lapeer," continued Lady Eger, vivaciously, "and Miss Fay, as sweet as a May morning! Were you going out? May I walk a little way with you? I suppose you are going first to Saint Peter's, that is the Mecca of all English and American tourists."

Mrs. Lapeer smiled and answered: "We had thought of going there first. It is so awkward, isn't it, going about in a strange city, where one does not know the language? Both my daughters speak French, which is some help."

"A great deal. With French, one can go anywhere. Would you care—could I be of any assistance to you, if I should accompany you? I do not wish to intrude, and some people prefer to do their sight-seeing alone."

THE JESUIT

There was a pretty air of timidity in the manner of making this offer, and Mrs. Lapeer and Fay replied in one voice: "We should be delighted to have you with us, Lady Eger."

In response to her half-shy glance at Janet, she, too, felt constrained to say: "Your knowledge of the city will be of the greatest assistance to us," although she felt that she would have been glad to have the first glance at the "Città Eterna" alone. Lady Eger's vivacity was a little wearisome to a person who wished to think and dream, as Janet loved to do.

"Then, if you do not mind waiting while I purchase a new pair of gloves—these are positively disreputable—we can take a carriage afterward to the church and get home in plenty of time for luncheon."

"That reminds me, girls, that we need gloves," said Mrs. Lapeer.

In a few moments Fay was reveling in a box of white and tan gloves, holding up her hand to have them tried on, while Janet, who declared that her wants were supplied for the present, amused herself in watching the ever-moving crowds on the Via Nazionale. One would not see better dressed women in New York. And the men were fine-looking, although, as a rule, not very tall. Priests were here, too, jostled by officers in trim uniform, peasant girls selling boutonnières, beggars presenting boxes of matches to the passers-by, parties of young ladies,

THE JESUIT

accompanied by eagle-eyed chaperons, and blasé men, who sauntered by, swinging their canes and twisting their waxed moustaches.

Janet turned her attention to the interior of the shop and found herself intently observing Lady Eger, who had just drawn on a pair of long black suède gloves, and who was absorbed in considering the weighty question as to whether they were a proper fit. Who was Lady Eger, anyway? She was an enigma to be solved. Janet assured herself that the process of solution would take some time. Lady Eger talked a great deal but *said* little. Yet she was by no means lacking in intelligence. Her black eyes were keen and searching, her lips were firm and her chin as square as would be becoming in womankind. Her soft brown hair was partially hidden under a widow's bonnet, from which hung a dainty black veil, in the most correct style. Mrs. Lapeer was small, but years had added to her portliness; Lady Eger was about the same height, and so slender, and delicately formed that she characterized the word "petite." Her black dress, relieved only by sheer linen bands at neck and wrists, perfectly fitted her well-rounded form. She was decidedly English, but there certainly was French blood in her; perhaps only a strain from some grandmother who had been mistress of a chateau on the banks of the Loire, but who had left an inheritance to Lady Eger of daintiness, grace, and attractiveness.

THE JESUIT

Janet forgot that she was staring until Lady Eger lifted her face from the contemplation of her gloves and smiled at her. She had been studying Lady Eger, and Lady Eger knew it.

"How do you like them, Miss Lapeer? I think they will do very well. Now, shall we go?" asked Lady Eger, calmly.



CHAPTER IV

AT the great door of Saint Peter's Church a hush fell upon them all. It was so vast, this building which contained a wealth of art and so many treasures of the Church. Fay spoke in whispers. Many people were in the church, but they seemed to be only a few, when compared with the immense nave, the tremendous height of the pillars, and the awesome sense of space. The Lapeers entered and then stood, amazed at the riches of decoration, the numberless statues, the exquisite mosaics, and the paintings, all of which were made by the hands of master artists. The morning sunshine penetrated a window at the very end of the apse, and a shaft of gold fell across the pavement and transformed a marble figure on the tomb of one of the popes into a creature of life, that seemed to breathe and become flesh.

About a dozen people were kneeling in a splendid chapel opening from a side aisle. Priests were celebrating mass. Their voices, as they intoned, echoed dully through the high, arched spaces. Mrs. Lapeer and her daughters stopped just outside the doorway, but Lady Eger passed in and sank upon her knees, crossed herself, and appeared to be absorbed in her devotions.

Fay exchanged a glance with Janet and raised

THE JESUIT

her eyebrows. Janet was dumb with surprise. It had not occurred to her that Lady Eger, an Englishwoman, was a Roman Catholic. She smiled a little at her own ignorance and simplicity. Why should she not be one? All the English were not Protestants any more than all the Americans were.

Her sensibilities, strongly Protestant, were to have another shock, and one from which Janet could not recover so quickly. They went slowly toward the high altar, surmounted by Bernini's Baldacchino, admiring, as they passed, the various works of art.

"Yonder stands a statue of the Empress Helena, the mother of Constantine, who found the true cross at Jerusalem and brought a piece of it back to Rome. In the opposite niche is that of Saint Veronica, whose handkerchief was offered to our Saviour that he might bathe the blood and sweat from his brow, and when he returned it the handkerchief bore the imprint of his face. On festas it is shown to the people from the balcony up there," Lady Eger explained.

Could it be possible that she believed all this?

"I think that is a beautiful legend," said Fay, enthusiastically. "Have you a book, Lady Eger, where one could read about all these things? It would make them so real."

"Indeed I have. I will get it for you when we go back to the pension."

On the right of the nave, just before one reaches

THE JESUIT

the high altar, stands a very ancient statue of Saint Peter. The hand is upraised in benediction, the first two fingers of the right hand being extended in precisely the same manner as that used by Pope Pius X when he enters Saint Peter's in state and bestows his blessing upon the crowds. The face, as well as the body and drapery, is of black basalt and the head is surrounded by a nimbus.

Janet and Fay watched the people, as they came forward to the statue and kissed the toe of the right foot, lowered their foreheads to touch it, and then kissed it again, bent the knee before it, and went away. Instinctively the words flashed into Janet's mind: "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image. . . . Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them nor worship them. For I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God—" What was this but idolatry, as much as in any heathen land? And yet she had supposed that Italy was a Christian country; that paganism was a thing of the past.

One after another—men, women, and children—approached and performed this act. Some were old and bowed with care; others were young and gayly dressed. One mother brought her baby and touched the foot with her hand, afterward rubbing it on the infant's forehead and muttering prayers as she did so, as if there were some healing power in the bronze statue. The lights sparkled red in the massive gold lamps above the tomb of the apostle, the mosaics glistened in rich color, the splendid

THE JESUIT

frescoes and priceless marbles represented the wealth of a sovereign—and the poor woman, with her baby, sought help and comfort from a bronze image!

A slight movement roused Janet from her musings. Lady Eger passed swiftly through the groups of people and stooping, pressed her lips to the toe, where a moment before, a rough-looking-man, with tobacco-stained beard and bleared eyes had placed his. Leaning forward, she laid her forehead upon the cold and lifeless foot, kissed it again, and returned.

This was more than Janet could bear in silence. Turning abruptly she passed rapidly down the nave and out on the broad porch, facing the spacious piazza, its obelisk and fountains, its colonnade and marble statues. It was now high noon, so the dull, heavy boom of a cannon announced, and, mechanically, together with everyone near her, she took out her watch, saw that it was correct to the second, and replaced it in her belt. It was one of those actions which one performs unconsciously while the mind is absorbed in thought. Ever the query arose: How could an intelligent woman, such as Lady Eger, believe in these things? There were many ignorant persons, whose actions could be easily understood, but Lady Eger!

“Yonder is our carriage, Miss Lapeer. Shall we walk around under the colonnade? The sun is very hot at noon.”

THE JESUIT

In the heat of her disgust and anger Janet disliked Lady Eger most vehemently at that moment, and she felt that the lady herself knew it; she noticed everything without seeming to. In silence she followed Fay and her mother, both of whom were in the best of spirits. Already she realized that some subtle influence was at work to separate her from those whom she loved so dearly. Neither Mrs. Lapeer nor Fay had been affected as she had been by the occurrences of the morning. As the carriage started, she saw Lady Eger reach over to shake hands with a gentleman, to whom she spoke in fluent Italian. She followed his look of admiration to Fay's sweet face, and knew that Lady Eger was speaking of them both, for he at once transferred his glance to herself, and she dropped her eyes to avoid meeting it.

"Marquis Guido di Cassini," Lady Eger explained later. "One of the best-known men in Rome. He belongs to a very old family. Not the impecunious kind, either; at least, it is common report that he is wealthy and he is unmarried. I have asked him to call tomorrow evening, on purpose to meet you all."

"So kind of you," murmured Mrs. Lapeer, secretly impressed by the marquis, or his title, it would have been hard to tell which.

"Not at all. It is a pleasure to present such charming girls as your daughters to my friends," added Lady Eger, in a low tone, audible to Mrs.

THE JESUIT

Lapeer only, "and if you will allow me, I will get them the entrée into some of the best families here."

"How can we ever repay your goodness!" exclaimed Mrs. Lapeer, in raptures at the prospect of a winter "in society" in Rome.

Lady Eger's eyes gleamed with a peculiar expression.

"I shall have my reward, my dear lady, do not fear. Isn't virtue always its own reward?" she replied, lightly. "We shall be late for luncheon, after all. The first train from Naples must be in, for I see a carriage at the door, with a lot of luggage on it. Somebody has arrived."

A gentleman superintended the removal of his numerous bags and packages, paid the coachman, and turned to enter the house just as the Lapeers and Lady Eger reached the door.

Lady Eger gave a gasp of joy, and rushed toward him, holding out both hands to grasp his big ones. "John!" she exclaimed, ecstatically, "where did you drop from?"

"From across the big water, Hortense. Thought I'd come over and see this great city you've been talking so much about. Are you glad to see me, or shall I go back again to my ranch?"

He looked down upon her benevolently from his six feet two of height.

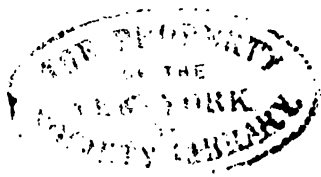
"Glad," echoed Lady Eger. "Indeed you are not going back to that horrid ranch. Mrs. Lapeer,

THE JESUIT

this is my brother, Sir John Hamilton. Miss Lapeer, Miss Fay Lapeer, my brother."

When Sir John Hamilton shook hands with Janet she felt as if a fresh breeze from the West, where man has a chance to breathe and expand, had enveloped her. She remembered once riding for miles across the prairies, with the strong wind in her face and masses of wild flowers spread out around her like a gorgeous carpet. The hearty grasp of his hand brought it all back—the exhilaration, the inspiration, the desire to know and to do.

"I am glad to know you, Miss Lapeer," he said, cordially. Then, allowing the ladies to pass in, he followed his sister upstairs.



CHAPTER V

"WHEN shall we go to see Alda Pierce?" asked Janet, a week later, coming into her mother's room after a brisk walk in the Villa Borghese.

Fay lay on the sofa absorbed in her book. She roused herself sufficiently to say: "It does not seem to me that there is any hurry about it. Lady Eger knows her slightly, she said, and she intimated that Mrs. Pierce is not in society here in Rome."

"Society is the loser then," retorted Janet, flushing. "Alda is the sweetest woman I ever knew, and would adorn a circle more refined than that of Roman princes and nobles."

"You are really growing tart, Janet," remonstrated her sister. "It's a very bad symptom. Lady Eger says it's a sure sign of advancing years."

Janet closed her lips to keep back another retort. She was very tired of hearing Lady Eger quoted. Since the day in Saint Peter's she had avoided the little lady, declining invitations to go sight-seeing or calling.

"What are you reading, Fay?"

"The Lives of the Saints, by Mrs. Jamieson. It's perfectly lovely. I had no idea that there were women who lived such beautiful lives and did such miraculous things. I cannot understand why we do not have such tales in our church, or why we must

THE JESUIT

be so dull and tasteless in the style of our churches. Compare our church at home with these here—the lovely paintings, the soft light, and the beautiful carvings. In themselves they are enough to excite one to devotion. Lady Eger says—”

Janet fled to the other room and Fay settled back again to her book. Going to the window Janet looked out upon the garden below and sighed. Why was it that Fay had been so different since they had come to Rome? Was it Lady Eger’s influence which was changing her so? And the mother—she too was altered. Her conversation ran continuously on society, marquises and counts, the Pope and the Vatican. “Marquises” reminded her of the Marquis di Cassini, whom Lady Eger had invited to meet them. Janet could not restrain a smile at the remembrance of Sir John Hamilton and his sister’s guest—the great tall, breezy Englishman and the dapper, up-to-date scion of a noble family, with waxed moustaches and hair smooth as satin. Sir John had a habit of rumpling his mass of brown curls when he was intent on anything of interest to him, and a conversation with Padre Veroni on subjects on which they were diametrically opposed had produced a startling effect just before the marquis arrived.

Lady Eger had a private sitting room, a cozy corner, where a wood fire crackled and blazed and shed a cheery blaze over photographs of men and women, noted in art, music, and literature, over a couch

THE JESUIT

covered with a handsome Kelim brought from Constantinople, a very inviting resting place with its piles of gaily covered cushions, over small tables of odd shapes, laden with the latest books. Flowers nestled in quaint brass bowls of beaten ware and a cluster of early chrysanthemums in sunshine tints grew and blossomed in a large Japanese vase. There were no electric lights here, but candles in majolica and glass holders, fastened to the walls at intervals, beamed with benign light and beautified and idealized the room. On a tiny table, quite by itself, stood a silver frame containing a large picture of Pope Pius X, in his white cassock, seated at a table, writing. It was a room exactly like Lady Eger, dainty, charming.

The marquis proved to be an excellent talker. He was interested in the questions of the day, in the condition of Italy under the present administration of the House of Savoy, an administration of which he very strongly approved and did not hesitate to say so.

"It is true that the taxes are a terrible weight upon the people," he said.

"Any worse than they were thirty-five years ago?" inquired Sir John.

The marquis frowned. Then he laughed, and with quick Italian wit parried the question.

"I really cannot say. I was not born then, having done the world the favor of arriving five years later."

THE JESUIT

Sir John joined in the hearty laugh which went around at his expense. He stood up and thrust his fingers through his hair. His figure was built on a generous scale and was not graceful, though it gave the impression of strength, both of mind and of body.

"At least, if they do pay more taxes, they have a right to call their souls their own, which is more than they had when the Popes had temporal power, if one may believe all the tales one hears."

The marquis bowed. "We agree on these points, Sir John, although you are a Protestant and I am a Catholic by birth. You are an Englishman and I am an Italian. Our views can scarcely be expected to harmonize and yet I love my country as much as you do yours. Now, Lady Eger—" Sir John gave a sudden movement and knocked off a bowl of roses with his elbow. It made a happy diversion, and the conversation turned to less argumentative themes.

Lady Eger leaned back in her large easy chair, held up a sandal-wood fan to screen her eyes, and watched her guests. She looked smaller and more delicate that night, in her long gown of filmy black.

Sir John talked to Janet, telling her about the great ranch he had out in California, where the lilies bloomed by the thousands, huge fields of them, white and stately, and where the roses overran his house and hung in clusters around his windows. The feeling of space grew as Janet listened to him

THE JESUIT

—he seemed so big in heart and views and experience. In an old, conservative city he was compressed like a strong north wind confined within the limits of a narrow cave.

"There are no flowers here in Italy to compare with ours, Miss Lapeer. You've never been in California, so you cannot understand. I love the place."

"I thought you were an Englishman, Sir John," she said, smiling at him as he overflowed the small gilt chair on which he was trying to be comfortable.

"So I am and always shall be—a genuine Britisher; but my home is in America and always will be as long as God allows me to live and work."

"Has Lady Eger ever been out to see your ranch?"

Sir John's kindly face clouded. "No, I am sorry to say, she does not care to come. The truth is, Miss Lapeer, Rome has a terrible grip on her in more ways than one. It's one reason I came, to tell the truth, and I feel that you will understand when I talk to you. You seem to be different from the rest. She was the dearest girl at home, so gay and simple-hearted. Five years ago she married the best fellow I ever knew—and he died. Maybe she'll tell you about it some day; I hope you'll be friends, Miss Lapeer, I really do. She needs a woman friend, God knows. These priests have her in their clutches. Pardon me if I speak strongly; I feel strongly and have reason to. You are not fascinated by these

THE JESUIT

black-robed men with their shifting, insincere eyes and all the glitter of their services, are you?" He leaned anxiously forward to catch her answer.

"Not in the least. Quite the contrary."

"I was sure of it. But look out for your sister, Miss Lapeer. One does not have to live here permanently to be conversant with the methods of the Roman Church. I am not ignorant of these priests, their wiles and their enticing ways. Keep an eye on her or they will get her, surely."

Janet involuntarily turned her eyes toward her sister, and Sir John smiled in the midst of his earnestness.

"O, I don't mean that there is any danger this minute. The marquis is quite harmless at present, though he'll bear watching—he'll bear watching. As I was saying, Lord Eger died two years after their marriage and Hortense was heartbroken over it. Some other griefs entered into it which it is not necessary to mention. She thought travel would divert her mind and I went everywhere with her for a year. She and I are quite alone in the world. It did relieve her suffering somewhat and as my business in America really required my personal supervision, and as she was as happy here in Rome as I could expect her to be anywhere, I left her. I have been very sorry since that I did. I might have kept the bloodhounds off. She went over to the Church of Rome—that's the long and short of it; went over with all the intensity of her nature. They

THE JESUIT

knew just how to draw her, how to sympathize with her. Padre Veroni—ah, he's a deep man, deep as the sea and twice as dangerous—Padre Veroni was plausible and touched her wounds so delicately that they began to heal and she thought it was the Church and not Padre Veroni; so she gave up the faith of her childhood, and adopted this new one. If it had brought her peace, I do not know that I should have the heart to object, but she is not happy—I see it and feel it. She is fearfully bigoted and goes to more extremes in forms and ceremonies than those who are born Roman Catholics; but perverts almost always do that. They always want to keep ahead for fear they can't keep even, I think. She needs a friend, a woman who understands her nature better than a clumsy man like myself."

"I don't know what I could do, Sir John," Janet responded, with hesitation.

"Against Padre Veroni and the Jesuits and all their machinery? My dear young lady, you can do nothing in a contest with *them*. A child cannot safely and successfully play with edged tools. But you can wait the chance to act her friend, can't you?"

His tone now was one of earnest pleading as of a big brother anxious for the safety of his little sister. It touched Janet strangely.

"I will try," she said, and rose, as her mother was saying good-night to Lady Eger.

The conviction came to Janet this autumn after-

THE JESUIT

noon that she had not kept her compact with Sir John. She had not tried to help Lady Eger; and yet, how could she? Lady Eger seemed to be a shrewd woman of the world, skilled in many arts of subterfuge and guile by these years under the tutelage of Padre Veroni and his associates. An American girl could not cope with her. And there was Sir John's warning about Fay—that they would try to entangle her in a web from which she could not extricate herself. Conscience twinges pricked Janet? Was she not allowing precious moments to slip by? Even now Fay was filling her mind with the beautiful myths of the Roman Church, for beautiful they are indeed, these legends of Saint Agnes, and Saint Catharine of Sienna, and Saint Bridget, and Saint Elizabeth of Hungary—the lives of good women, many of whom suffered for righteousness' sake in the early history of the Christian faith, maidens and matrons whom we revere for their purity and usefulness. But the tales have been embroidered during these centuries with supernatural designs, miracles, and remarkable cases of healing, until the simple-hearted saints themselves would be horrified and amazed could they know for what purpose their life stories are being used. Still, they were tales to fascinate the mind of a girl and cause her to see in everything connected with the Church something mysterious and attractive.

With sudden resolution Janet knelt down beside

THE JESUIT

her narrow bed and prayed with more earnestness than she had prayed for some weeks. This new country with its marvelous treasures had drawn her mind from higher thoughts; she had forgotten to "seek those things which are above and not those which are of the earth." The line of an old hymn ran through her mind: "A need for earnest prayer." When she rose from her knees it was with renewed strength for a battle which she felt sure was imminent, a battle in which her own feeble strength would count for nothing; "but with God all things are possible."

She put on her hat and drew on her gloves as once more she entered her mother's room.

"Hasn't mamma come back yet? It's such a lovely day. Come, little sister, let's go for a walk. You'll make your head ache if you read so long." She smoothed back Fay's hair, loosened above her smooth, white forehead. "Do come, dear. I'm tired of going around alone."

Fay flung away her book. "Of course, I'll go if you really want me. You've been so strange and cold lately. I could not imagine why. And you never would go out with us when Lady Eger asked us to go. I've missed you Janet, so much, you dear, old sister."

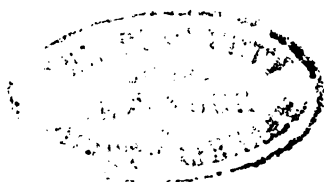
Fay's energetic hug was nearly ruinous to Janet's new autumn hat, but she did not mind that now.

"Then hurry and get dressed. I'll go wherever you like."

THE JESUIT

"No. I'll go where you want to, even to see Alda Pierce."

Thinking it better to take advantage of Fay's remarkable spirit of self-sacrifice Janet led the way toward the home of the only friend she had in Rome.



CHAPTER VI

MRS. PIERCE was at home, the trim maid intimated by nod and smile, ushering them into a room which bore unmistakable evidence of American taste in furnishing. The windows were high and wide, admitting a flood of afternoon sunshine. An open piano was strewn with music, an abundance of books were on shelves and tables, and some tea-roses were artistically arranged in a majolica bowl.

"It looks exactly like Alda!" exclaimed Janet. "And there is a picture of our old room and the campus, and a group of our class. I wonder if she looks any older. She was the dearest girl!"

The door opened to admit a woman carrying an infant in her arms. Her smooth brown hair was slightly loosened about her face, her eyes were brown, and large; her mouth was formed like a bow from the hands of Cupid, and her dress was of dark brown, the color of her eyes, very simply made, but of exquisite taste.

"Alda!" said Janet. "I am so glad to see you again, after five years—how long it seems since you sailed for Naples with your husband!"

"No more glad than I am to see you here in my home. And Fay too. Fay has grown."

"Now that's a shame of you, Mrs. Pierce, to

THE JESUIT

twit me on my youth. I'm twenty years old, I'd have you know."

"And fifteen when I saw you last. You certainly have grown."

They all laughed and baby stretched out its little arms to Janet, who seized upon her eagerly.

"You darling! how did you know that I wanted to cuddle you? What's her name, Alda? And how old is she?"

"She is Alda number two," broke in Mr. Pierce's deep voice. "How do you do, Miss Lapeer and Miss Fay. We are delighted to see you. And your mother, is she well?"

"Very well, and will be glad to see you at the Speranza."

"Is that where you are stopping?" inquired Mrs. Pierce, with a curious intonation.

"Yes. Is there anything wrong about the place, Alda? Please tell me frankly. Aunt Mary told us we had better go to the Windsor, but on the steamer we met Padre Veroni."

"Padre Veroni!" exclaimed Mr. and Mrs. Pierce in unison. "Go on, Janet, this waxes interesting and may prove exciting," added Mrs. Pierce.

Janet began to look anxious.

"Well, we met the priest, and mamma liked him very much; so when he recommended us to go to the Speranza we went. Tell me what is wrong, Alda, please do."

THE JESUIT

"Nothing is wrong, dear, only it is a perfect hotbed of Roman Catholicism, so we are assured, though comfortable and pleasant. Naturally, many people stop there who are not Catholics. Do you know Lady Eger?"

"Yes."

"And like her?"

There was a painful pause, broken by Fay, who had been playing with the baby. She now raised her head, a little defiantly, it seemed to Janet.

"Lady Eger is a lovely woman and has helped us so much in seeing Rome and planning our trips. I don't know what we should have done without her. And as to the pension, I have never found a place where the service and table were so good or people were so generally kind."

"That is all true," Janet added. "We have certainly no reason to be dissatisfied there; quite the contrary."

Fay sent a grateful look toward Janet. A bright red spot burned in each cheek and a threatened storm was averted by Janet's cautious remark.

Mrs. Pierce laid her hand softly on Fay's. "My dear, I meant no offense either to Lady Eger or to the pension, and nothing was farther from my thoughts than to gossip. We who work here in Rome, and are interested heart and soul in our work, naturally keep our wits sharpened all the time."

"What do you think about Padre Veroni?"

THE JESUIT

asked Janet of Mr. Pierce, going directly to the point.

Mrs. Pierce was showing Fay some of the odd Italian ornaments which they had accumulated during the five years of their residence in Rome, so that the conversation could not be heard.

"He is a priest of the most polished type, suave, a man who knows men and probes to the very depths of their souls. I may say that he is a very unusually intelligent man, high-bred, speaking several languages, and is all the more dangerous for these characteristics. He has been sent on important missions to Spain and Austria by the Pope and is very much in favor at the Vatican. It is reported that he has declined a bishopric. The general opinion is that it is not due to extreme modesty or to a desire to work in a humble sphere, but to an ambition to wear a cardinal's hat, without passing through any intermediate stages. These opinions may wrong him. I do not know."

"Here comes the tea," said Mrs. Pierce. "You do not know how much pleasure it gives me, Janet, to have you in our home. Tell me all about the people in Clyde. What a charming place that was—such lovely houses, with beautiful lawns and gay flowers! Will you hold baby while I pour the tea, Janet? See how quiet she is with you."

Janet clasped her arms around the tiny form which nestled so warmly against her. The child laid her head, covered with soft, yellow curls, back

THE JESUIT

against her and Janet felt a new warmth in her heart.

The door opened, admitting a man who was so large that he seemed to fill the room with his presence.

"Sir John!" exclaimed Mr. Pierce, rising hastily to greet his guest. "We could have no more joyful surprise. Alda, here is Sir John Hamilton, returned from the wilds of California."

"Say, rather, from the paradise of California," Sir John corrected, shaking hands with Mrs. Pierce; and then, bowing to Janet, he seated himself by Fay.

"You have come back now to stay a while with us, haven't you, Sir John?" asked Mrs. Pierce.

"As long as my sister wants me to."

"Ah!" responded Mrs. Pierce, expressively.

"I have arranged my business matters so that I can stay away for two years, if necessary. I must confess to a tremendous longing for broad fields and great, lonely distances where one can commune with nature. In these conservative old cities I feel oppressed and cannot get my breath. This morning, I went for a long hard ride on the Campagna; it comes the nearest to an open space of anything around here."

"Sir John Hamilton!" exclaimed a lady behind him. "Have you forgotten an old friend? When did you come to Rome?"

Sir John took the hand of a white-haired, portly

THE JESUIT

woman in both his. "Mrs. Potter! This is an unexpected pleasure? Have you just returned from the country? Tell me what you have been doing in these years of my absence, my dear lady. I see that Rome is still here."

"Rome! Sir John! Rome is eternal, immortal. New worlds may be discovered, new continents arise out of the sea, and new nations be born, but Rome still holds the scepter in her seat upon the Seven Hills."

"Hear! Hear! Mrs. Potter is a Romaphile, Miss Lapeer."

"You have come from America, I hear. How could you stand it out there among those dreadful cowboys, who carry revolvers in both hands and shoot if you differ with them?"

"A little overdrawn, Mrs. Potter, if you please. The cowboy is more or less a fiction of the imagination. He still exists in dime novels—"

"I have been to see Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, the 'greatest in the world,' Sir John. I know that America is full of Indians and cowboys."

Fay laughed outright and Mrs. Potter turned her spectacles upon her. The eyes behind the spectacles were twinkling merrily.

"You are an American, aren't you, my dear? A pretty good specimen of one, too. Got any Indian blood in you?"

Sir John's hearty laughter aroused Mr. and Mrs. Pierce, who were deep in conversation with two

THE JESUIT

Italian gentlemen. Their hostess came toward them.

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Potter, I have not given you any tea."

"Make it weak, my dear, with plenty of sugar. And, Miss Lapeer," she continued, as Janet consigned Alda to a neat maid and rose to go, "come and see me—22 Via Parma, second floor—and bring your sister. I like Americans, though I never had any desire to go to your country. It's too new and big for me, but just about suits Sir John, who requires considerable room. My regular day at home is Wednesday, but don't come then. Come some morning. By the way, have you a mother or any sort of chaperon along with you? You are both entirely too handsome to be over here alone, but one can never tell what queer things you people are going to do next. You are so youthful and confiding."

"Our mother is with us," replied Janet, puzzled to know whether she ought to be on her dignity with this remarkable old lady, whose tight white curls on each side of her forehead fell beneath a very large bonnet with red flowers in the front, or whether to follow her inclination and laugh.

"Then bring her along, or, better yet, you come alone some morning, my dear, if your sister doesn't object, and ask your mother to bring her on Wednesday, at four, remember. Sit down here, Sir John, and tell me all about yourself."

THE JESUIT

"What a funny old lady!" Fay said to Mrs. Pierce, who accompanied them to the door of the apartment.

"Very funny, but as good as gold. She is greatly interested in all good works, and has a large number of acquaintances in Rome. One of her dearest friends is the sister of a prominent cardinal, and another is the chief lady in waiting to the queen mother. Good-by, girls. Do come again, and soon. I am so busy with the baby and our work, but I shall certainly call with Mr. Pierce to return your visit and see Mrs. Lapeer."

"Of all the queer characters!" Fay continued on the walk home. "I shall love to see her home. It must be like herself—full of all sorts of oddities. She's not very complimentary, to invite mother and me to come with everybody else, while you are invited to a private session."

"I am coming to the conclusion that there are more different people and peculiar characters to be found in Rome than anywhere else in the world," Janet replied. "Let us go down to the top of the Spanish steps, Fay, and watch the sun set."

Along the marble balustrade at the top of the broad staircase leading down to the Piazza di Spagna, a number of persons were standing. Behind them rose the obelisk in front of the great church connected with the Convent of the Holy Trinity. Many carriages rolled by, carrying ladies,

THE JESUIT

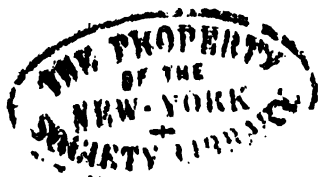
tourists, officers to and from the Pincian Hill. At that hour hundreds of people gathered in the park, some to drive among the palms and roses, others to gossip in their carriages, sitting under the shade of a splendid oak or ilex.

Those who were watching the orb of day as he sank to repose in soft coverlets of rose clouds stood absolutely silent. All were not by any means strangers or tourists. Better than his daily bread, the Italian loves the beautiful; it is to him the breath of life, the inspiration of his soul. A grocer's boy, bearing a huge basket on his head, set his load on the balustrade, put his hands in his pockets, and prepared to enjoy the feast of rich color. A poor woman, bowed with the weight of great sorrow and suffering, leaned against the railing and reveled in the beauty of the scene before her. An officer, brilliant in uniform and gold braid, with his wife, stood shoulder to shoulder with a stout German in rough tweed suit and Tyrolese hat, decorated with a cock's feather. A few carriages stopped and the ladies held their lace parasols down to protect their complexions from the glare while gazing at the fast-disappearing ball of fire. The towers of Rome were flooded with gorgeous red light. The haze upon distant Monte Mario became translucent and glorious, then faded to dull blue—for the sun had set.

The grocer's boy picked up his load, hoisted it to his head and walked away, whistling cheerily. The

THE JESUIT

old woman stretched out her hand with a begging whine to the officer, who dropped a coin into it. The carriages drove on to the Pincio, and Fay and Janet went home through the shadows of the Via Sistina.



CHAPTER VII

THE Marchesa di Cassini came duly with her three daughters to make a call on Mrs. Lapeer. As a result of this visit and a proper exchange of cards, an invitation came to the Lapeers at the Speranza. The card bore a coronet, and beneath it the name of the marchioness, who would be at home on Saturday, November 10, from five to seven o'clock, at the Palazzo Cassini.

November 10 was a stormy day. Clouds hung bleakly over Rome and rain fell in torrents, while the sirocco, the damp, depressing south wind, blew, and moisture clung to the walls and the marble stairways and made everything disagreeable. It had its effect upon the temper, too, and it was easy to see that Lady Eger was badly moved from her usual tranquil condition, and even Sir John, the personification of cheerfulness, smoked moodily alone.

"So you do not want to go to tea with the Marchesa di Cassini," Janet heard Lady Eger ask her brother when they rose from a dismal luncheon.

"No, Hortense, I do not," he replied with decision.

A few minutes later, when Janet entered the parlor she found Sir John there, pacing the floor with long impatient strides.

THE JESUIT

"It's like being shut up in a cage, and a gilded cage at that," he grumbled.

"Why don't you go out, Sir John?"

"What's the use? I must either walk the streets or shut myself up in a cab with the cover up and a rubber apron drawn over me. And now comes that tea at the Marchesa's! I told Hortense I wouldn't go, but I suppose I'll have to, if only to keep my eye upon those gentlemen in the black gowns, who will inveigle her into leaving them all her money if I don't stand guard! Not that I want her money, Miss Lapeer," he added, hastily, a deep red flush mounting to his forehead. "I do not mind if she throws it away to the beggars in the street, but I do not want the Roman Church to have the fortune dear, good Arthur left to her. And they know just how to wheedle the gold out of one's pocket, Miss Lapeer, I assure you they do. Now I've eased my mind, I feel better. It looks as if the clouds were breaking away. I'll go cheerfully into that nest of 'Blacks' and drink my tea and find out what they're up to, but only on Hortense's account. If it were not for her—well, if it were not for her, I should not be here at all."

Sir John laughed and the cloud passed from his honest face. When Janet saw him again he was drinking tea from a costly cup and talking to an elderly gentleman in fluent Italian. He made a grimace at her over his cup and continued the conversation.

THE JESUIT

The Cassini Palace was massive and imposing. It consisted of three stories built in large blocks of brown stone, the windows on the ground-floor being heavily barred with iron. At the great door stood a man in uniform, wearing a huge cocked hat trimmed with gold lace, slightly tarnished with long usage. He removed this hat as the carriage drove into the court, where the ladies alighted at the foot of a very wide marble staircase, having on one side a railing of marble, and on the other side, in niches; a number of very valuable, very ancient statues.

"I wish we had thought to get a coupé from the livery stable," murmured Mrs. Lapeer, going slowly up the stairs. "In the midst of all this grandeur our poor little numbered cab looks insignificant."

"I do not believe it makes any difference," responded Janet, gently. "To these people we are nothing but Americans, and they will never give us a second thought."

"I am not so sure of that," said Mrs. Lapeer to herself, having her own reasons for thinking otherwise.

Very keenly she noted the furnishings and arrangements of the palace, the splendid courtyard, where many carriages waited already, the long series of salons opening out of each other, richly carpeted, decorated with magnificent paintings and sculpture, generously supplied with furniture in gilt and damask. No, observe as closely as she would, Mrs. Lapeer could see no sign of the decadent, im-

THE JESUIT

pecunious nobility which she had feared might be a reason for the very marked attention which the Marquis di Cassini was paying to her daughter Fay.

The marquis came forward to meet them from a group of men. "Mother, Mrs. Lapeer and her daughters," he announced, pushing through the crowd which surrounded the hostess.

"I am more than delighted to see you," said the marchioness in French to Mrs. Lapeer.

As far as she was concerned, the language might have been Choctaw, for Mrs. Lapeer could not understand one word of French.

Being a lady of resources, she smiled, easily imagining what the marchesa would be likely to say under the circumstances, murmured a few polite sentences in her own tongue, and passed on to a post of observation, leaving her daughters to do and say the proper thing.

"I have great hopes of Fay," Mrs. Lapeer said to Janet a few minutes later. "Do you see how the marquis bends toward her? How devoted he looks! She would adorn these halls, Janet, and I should so pray that she would be happy."

Mrs. Lapeer and Janet stood a little apart from the chattering crowds of men and women, near a heavily curtained window. The sounds from the street below penetrated faintly through the glass and draperies. Janet grasped the mantel of a tall console standing near her to keep from falling with

THE JESUIT

a sudden faintness. If a thunderbolt had struck her it could not have been more startling. She, too, had noticed the very evident admiration which the marquis had shown for Fay. But it did not surprise her. Ever since she had been a baby Fay had been a center of attraction.

"What do you mean, mamma?"

"Janet, I have seen it coming for a month, and both hoped and feared that it might be possible for the dear child to love him. It would be such a conquest, Janet. A marquis, and not a poor fellow who wants to exchange a title for our wealth—a genuine nobleman, with wealth and position. Our Fay would be a marchioness, a member of a fine old Roman family, with generations behind them, and a coat-of-arms, and all that. I've been looking around and everything shows prosperity."

"A conquest!" groaned Janet.

"Of course it would be. My grandfather was a country storekeeper and your father's mother was a farmer's daughter. Your father would be so pleased, Janet."

Mrs. Lapeer's face was quite flushed in her excitement.

"I had hopes before, but now I have certainty. I intended to tell you today, though I haven't mentioned it to her. Last evening the marquis told me he loved her and asked me to sanction the marriage. It was really embarrassing, and such a responsibility for me to take. I longed so for your father."

THE JESUIT

Janet groaned again. If her good, sensible father were only here! How soon they would leave the marquis and his title and fortune and Rome itself behind them! Janet could not tell whether she hated or loved Rome.

"I told him that I could not give him a definite answer. That in America girls decided these matters for themselves. If Fay loved him, I should not oppose the marriage; but I wouldn't for the world drive her into anything against her will. And he said—"

"Miss Lapeer, you have forgotten your promise. You have never come to see me."

"O, Mrs. Potter!" exclaimed Janet, glad of the diversion.

"This is your mother, I suppose. Madame, I am glad to make your acquaintance. I have already fallen in love with your daughter."

"Really, Mrs. Potter, I have not had a free morning since—"

"My dear, no excuses, I beg of you. Once I came to Rome for the first time. I shall never forget it. How sad that there can be only one first time for everything in our lives! The down is rubbed so soon from the peach. I see that your other daughter is already a favorite, Mrs. Lapeer. The young marquis has eyes for no one else. I have heard flattering remarks made about her, and some prognostications for the future."

"Very kind," murmured Mrs. Lapeer.

THE JESUIT

"I am not so sure that they are kind," was the unexpected reply.

Mrs. Lapeer looked surprised and a trifle annoyed. This old lady was almost offensive in speaking so familiarly of Fay and the marquis. It was not pleasing to have Fay's name bandied about lightly on the lips of strangers.

Janet hastened to say: "You know all these people, do you not, Mrs. Potter? Can you tell me who they are?"

"With pleasure, yes, I know almost all of them—some only too well. Have you had any tea yet? Let us go into the dining room."

"Call Fay, Janet," said Mrs. Lapeer, suddenly eager to have her daughter under her protection again. Mrs. Potter's words had disturbed her strangely.

Half way down the long salon they noticed a sudden pause and parting in the crowd, and advancing toward them came a man of about sixty-five years of age. A small, scarlet skull cap was set well back on his iron-gray hair, scarlet trimmings were on his black robes, and scarlet stockings showed above his shoes as he walked in a dignified manner, bowing to acquaintances and occasionally stopping to speak to a friend. Close beside him was Padre Veroni and a little behind came Don Paolo Gregori, whom Janet had not seen since the morning after her arrival in Rome. He was paler and thinner, she thought, and there were hollows around his

THE JESUIT

eyes which told of night vigils and long prayers before the altar. Don Paolo was still a seeker after that truth which ever eluded him.

"Cardinal Perotti!" exclaimed Mrs. Potter, in a subdued voice. "My dear, you are in the presence of the power behind the throne, of the most polished diplomat in Rome."

Mrs. Lapeer stepped to one side as she saw the three priests advancing, and Janet and Fay did the same, but Mrs. Potter advanced serenely, calmly facing the cardinal, whose austere face softened to a smile when he saw her.

"It is Madame Potter! My dear lady, I am delighted to meet you. You have passed the summer in the Abruzzi, haven't you?"

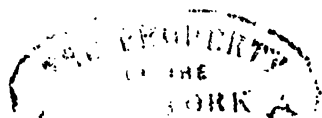
"With the sister of Cardinal Massimini, Eminenza."

"Precisely. I saw him a day or two ago and he told me of the great kindness which you showed to the poor peasants in the village. Ah, Madame, if all Protestants showed your liberality, your generosity!" He raised his hands expressively. Padre Veroni spoke a few words in his ear.

"Ah, yes. Where are they?" was the cardinal's response.

"Directly in front of you, Eminenza."

"Madame will permit?" the prelate asked, and with a bow he passed on, followed by the two priests. The crowd behind closed in again, and the laughter and hum of conversation began once more.



THE JESUIT

"This is Mrs. Lapeer, Eminenza," said Padre Veroni. "Cardinal Perotti wishes to know you, Mrs. Lapeer. And these are her daughters, the American girls of the period, Eminenza."

The cardinal comprehended the group in a glance. He saw the loving, ambitious mother, in her matronly dignity, stately, composed Janet, and Fay, charming in her youthful beauty.

"Then the American girl of the period is just what she ought to be," responded the cardinal. It was one of his gifts that he knew the right thing to say at the right moment.

The priests passed on and Mrs. Lapeer and her daughters escaped to the dining room. Mrs. Potter had disappeared, so they made their way with some timidity to a long table on one side of the splendid room. No prince could boast more exquisite tapestries than these heirlooms of the sixteenth century. There was no handsomer carved furniture to be found in Rome than this which belonged to the Marquis di Cassini. Servants, wearing the Cassini livery, brown cloth with pink facings, stood behind the tables, ready to dispense the dainty refreshments to the guests.

It was then that Janet saw Sir John, who soon forsook his elderly companion and came to see what he could do for Mrs. Lapeer's comfort.

"Tea, Mrs. Lapeer? Sandwiches and cake? Please take a good supply, for, big as I am, those dignified gentlemen behind the table frighten me.

THE JESUIT

I do not dare risk provoking their wrath a second time. We'll just keep these plates here and they'll be convenient when you want more."

"Thank you, so much, Sir John," said Mrs. Lapeer, sinking down into a large chair which he moved toward her. "I am tired!"

"So am I," confided Sir John. "I am always tired at receptions. They are an invention of the evil one to punish man for his misdeeds."

"I have not seen Lady Eger," said Janet.

"O, she's here somewhere. There she is yonder, talking to the Princess Malatesta."

"Is that a princess?" exclaimed Fay in such surprise that they all laughed.

"Yes, and one of the biggest ones. They do not wear their coronets always, but take them off for a rest. Joking aside though, I hope you will come here some time to an evening affair. They do not give any yet, for the season is not open. Carnival time is the height of gaiety. It is really a wonderful sight. Then the princesses wear their coronets and the display of gems is magnificent."

"I do hope the marchioness will invite us," sighed Fay.

"I think she will, if you are very sweet to her. Here comes the cardinal for his cup of tea. If you've finished, suppose we go back into the Green Salon."

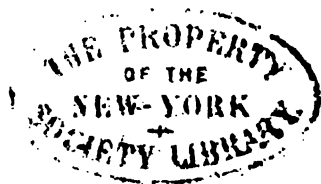
Sir John hastily led the way out, brushing by Padre Veroni with little ceremony.

THE JESUIT

"What makes him dislike priests so?" inquired Fay when they had bidden the marchioness and her three daughters good-by effusively, and the marquis had accompanied them to their carriage, appearing to be sublimely oblivious to the fact that it was a numbered hack, that the coachman's nose was red, and the horse limped.

"I don't know, I am sure," replied the mother, who was absorbed in her own thoughts.

Janet was silent. She began to understand why Sir John Hamilton disliked Padre Veroni.



CHAPTER VIII

"THOSE are the Americans of whom you spoke," the cardinal said, leaning his head against the high back of his leather-covered chair.

A gilt cardinal's hat, with his coat-of-arms, was stamped on the back of this and every other chair in the room. It was the library of a student. Long bookcases lined the walls. Tables on which reading lamps were conveniently placed stood in front of easy chairs. The whole aspect was pleasing and attractive. It was dark outside and the light from the lamp on the desk in front of the cardinal shed a yellow radiance over his face and that of Padre Veroni who sat near him. The rest of the room lay in deep shadows. It was a scene worthy of Rembrandt's brush—the darkness, the narrow circle of light, the two faces, the touch of bright color in the cardinal's scarlet cap, the glitter of his ring as he nervously tapped his white fingers on the green cloth covering the desk.

"Yes, those are the ones."

"Tell me about them once more. I have forgotten the details or, perhaps, I was not listening intently when you told me before. There are three ladies."

"Yes, the mother, Mrs. Lapeer, is the widow of a wealthy lumberman—"

THE JESUIT

"What is a lumberman?" interrupted the cardinal. Padre Veroni smiled.

"I forgot that your Eminence had never been in America. He is not a man who cuts timber, necessarily, but the proprietor of a large lumber yard, from which boards are shipped all over the country. We, in Italy, where wood is scarce and expensive, cannot comprehend the vastness of this business."

"I understand. Go on," commanded the cardinal. "This Signor Lapeer made his wealth in selling boards. Rather a strange business, but as long as he got rich, it is no doubt perfectly respectable and certainly clean."

Padre Veroni smiled again, dutifully, at the humor of his superior.

"And the name Lapeer—is it French?"

"I fancy it is. From something Mrs. Lapeer said I inferred that her husband's family came from Canada and the name was probably La Pierre, vulgarized into Lapeer."

The cardinal nodded. "I understand," he repeated. "The daughters have some French blood. That accounts for—Go on."

"To make the story short, I ascertained that Mrs. Lapeer is an ambitious woman, not for herself but for her children. She is absolutely in control of a large fortune; but more than that, the daughters have about a million francs apiece."

A short exclamation of surprise broke from the

cardinal's lips. "The board business must have been profitable," he observed.

"They have no other close relatives. There is a sister whom Mrs. Lapeer mentioned, but she lives far out in the West and is not a person of much consequence. The daughters are very attractive."

"Particularly the older one," remarked the cardinal.

"Your Eminence has sharp eyes and an excellent intuition in character. Miss Janet is intelligent, refined, and, while not beautiful, has a remarkable face. Every time I look at her I think what a dignified abbess she would make."

"She has no leanings toward the monastic life?"

"Your Eminence forgets that they are Protestants," protested Padre Veroni, spreading out his hands in deprecation.

His glance encountered that of the cardinal, on whose thin lips there was a dry smile.

"Yes," he said, simply.

"The younger daughter is gay, thoughtless, and as attractive as most American girls are, and that is saying a good deal. But she lacks depth."

"She has a million francs, I believe?"

"So I understood from her mother."

"Mrs. Lapeer seems to be a confiding woman to have disclosed so much of her private affairs."

"Mrs. Lapeer would enjoy the confessional, Eminenza. She is the type of woman for whom the confessional was made. She delights to pour out

THE JESUIT

her soul to someone whom she considers her superior, especially a clergyman. I have no doubt she goes to her minister at home in the same spirit."

"And Padre Veroni knew just how to draw her out," remarked the cardinal.

The priest smiled consciously.

"What are you going to do about it?"

"It is for your Eminence to say," was Padre Veroni's humble reply.

"Nonsense! I should have asked, what have you done about it? You certainly have not allowed all these weeks to pass without some efforts."

"I recommended them to go to the Speranza."

"Ah! and they went?"

"Yes. I decided to take rooms there myself for reasons of convenience."

"I see."

"Then I introduced them to Lady Eger."

"You are a general, Padre Veroni. Should the Black Pope's seat become vacant, I know no better candidate for his place."

Padre Veroni glanced furtively around, as if to pierce the darkness. "Are we alone, Eminenza? Even the walls have ears."

In reply the cardinal touched a button on his desk and a door opened immediately.

"Turn on the electric lights, Giuseppe."

"Yes, Eminenza."

A flood of illumination fell upon the tall bookcases, the carved chairs, the mosaic tables.

THE JESUIT

"You see we are quite alone," he said, with a touch of scorn in his voice. "So Lady Eger will attend to the rest. Very well. The end will be achieved without doubt."

"There is another factor which enters into the question."

"What is that?"

"Marchese di Cassini is a regular visitor at the Speranza."

"Lady Eger?"

"No, he calls on the Lapeers. Tomorrow, if it is pleasant, they will go to the Castelli Romani in his new automobile."

"Which one is it that he wishes to marry?"

"The younger one, Miss Fay."

By which it will be seen that Padre Veroni kept a closer watch on Mrs. Lapeer and her family than any of them dreamed.

"And the marquis is liberal?"

"Decidedly. He will represent his constituency in the Parliament this year. He has been to the San Rossore within the last three weeks, to pay a visit to the king."

"It is strange that he has these tendencies when his father was so intimate with Leo XIII; and his mother is a devoted Roman Catholic. Floria is now in a convent, isn't she?"

"She will take the veil in the spring. Eminenza, the marquis is a type of the Italian man of the present day. We hold on to the women through the

THE JESUIT

confessional and our control spiritually—and sometimes more than spiritually—and through them control also their families. But the men are beginning to think for themselves. They are slipping away from us. If the day ever comes when church and state are separated in France, it will be a serious blow to the Church's power here in Italy. Already there are mutterings of unrest in Spain, our stronghold for so many centuries. And in the ranks of the priesthood, there is constant agitation. Seditious and heretical books are circulated. The Protestants are making strides even here in Rome. The liberal influences are permeating the ranks of the people. Schools are being established everywhere, not under our control, but by the government, and by the Protestants, and the youth are being instructed in new ideas of liberty—'the voice of the people is the voice of God,' and all that."

"The Pope has commanded Don Mazzetti to vacate the chair of theology in the college," added the cardinal.

"Yes, because he has lectured on free will and the right of independent thought. The movement is growing. There are hidden fires in the Church, as dangerous as those which smolder in the heart of Vesuvius and Etna, which are liable to break out at any moment. It does no permanent good to depose Don Mazzetti. His teachings are imprinted on the minds of the students; they will follow him. The cry of reform in the Church has already begun

THE JESUIT

and the Protestants are fermenting it and pushing on the movement. Something must be done. Look at Pierce over yonder in the center of Rome. He is establishing schools in country districts; he is purchasing property in all parts of Italy for the missionary society he represents. They send missionaries to Italy, missionaries to the land which gave the Church to them! We shall have to do something about this matter, and soon. The emigrants go to America and return, bringing fresh ideas of liberty, freedom, and equality and all such nonsense from that rich republic. They bring over heretical views, too, and during the long winter evenings they talk about these things among their families and friends. The consequence is that many adopt the Protestant religion, or, if not, the influence of the parish priest is diminished. In one case, the population of an entire village have forsaken the faith of their fathers, and Pierce has sent a minister there, a sort of colporteur who sells Bibles to the people for miles around. The priest got hold of some of the Bibles and burned them in the public square, but it created such a disturbance that he was obliged to desist. Things are coming to a pretty pass when a priest is at the mercy of a crowd of miserable contadini! This happened in southern Italy and Sicily, too."

Padre Veroni did not add, as he might have done, "and where, up to within a few years, until the establishment of schools by the government, seventy-

THE JESUIT

five per cent of the population could neither read nor write."

In his excitement the priest had risen from his chair and was pacing the floor of the long library, pausing for a moment in front of the cardinal to emphasize some remark with a rapid gesture, then continuing his walk.

"I cannot think that matters are as bad as you say," rejoined the cardinal. "Our priests are loyal to the Church, and it will be many a long year, even centuries, before the Pope of Rome will give place to a Protestant bishop."

"That is true, but the cry is 'Reform! reform!' Have you read Fogazzaro's new book, *Il Santo*?"

"No."

"Read it, then, Eminenza. I warn you that you will not like it any more than I did. It will be placed on the Index of forbidden books, of course. In fact, the Pope is already preparing the proper document absolutely forbidding any publisher to print it, or any shopkeeper to place it on sale on pain of excommunication. But what good will that do? The evil is done, as in the case of Mazzetti. The book has sold enormously; it may have been translated into English for all I know, and it will continue to be printed and sold. Thousands of men in Italy today snap their fingers at the bull of excommunication. We are not in the Dark Ages, but in the twentieth century, where even the auto-

THE JESUIT

cratic Czar of the Russias has to bow to the will of the people."

"I will read Fogazzaro's book."

"Do so, your Eminence,"—Padre Veroni's eyes twinkled—"before it is placed on the Index."

"About the marquis?"

"I had forgotten him, in this matter of such vital importance to me. I will watch the progress of events. Strange to say, it was Lady Eger who presented the young man to Mrs. Lapeer, and invites him to her room."

"Lady Eger may need watching. One can never rely on the converts. Their early training predisposes them to peculiar ideas."

"Lady Eger is all right. Converts are often more bigoted than we are. It is the influence of her brother."

"Is he back again? I thought that the wild West had swallowed him up."

"He is too big to be swallowed. Really, I like the man, he is so wholesome and hearty. But he is an important element in the affair. I have my suspicion that he is attracted—"

The servant opened the door noiselessly.

"The dinner is served, Eminenza."

"You will remain, Veroni? I should like to talk with you further on these matters and others."

"As your Eminence wishes," replied Padre Veroni, walking toward the dining room with the cardinal.

THE JESUIT

The man held a heavy velvet portière aside that they might enter, and another servant stood waiting behind the cardinal's chair, while a third was motionless in front of the sideboard, on which a number of massive pieces of silver were arranged.

A cover had already been laid for Padre Veroni, who was a frequent visitor to the cardinal. The apartment was in a wing of the Vatican palace on the second, or main, floor of that great building, under whose ample roof not only the Pope and his personal attendants but several cardinals and other officials of the Vatican have their homes. So enormous is the palace, that these different persons can have separate apartments, containing many rooms, and a host of servants, without interfering in any way one with the other.

The round table was covered with a cloth of finest Flanders linen, in the center of which the cardinal's coat-of-arms was woven. Light fell in subdued radiance from a superbly wrought silver lamp suspended above the table. A cluster of delicate pink chrysanthemums in a rare vase were in the center. The china was in the best taste, the service unsurpassed, and the dinner very simple but fit for an epicure.

Cardinal Perotti was a flower worshiper. His rooms were always decorated with plants in full blossom, according to the season. In different parts of the dining hall were tall palms, rose trees covered

THE JESUIT

with buds and blossoms, and even the humble violet, forced to flower at this unseasonable time, shed its delicate fragrance from a small glass bowl beside the cardinal's plate.

With the coming of the fruit the servants disappeared, leaving the cardinal and his guest alone over their wine and grapes, fresh from the cardinal's own vines in his vineyard several miles outside the city walls.

"I wanted to ask you about Don Paolo. Is he doing well?"

"As far as his work is concerned, he is very successful."

"What is the trouble with him? I noticed his serious manner, his apparent sadness today. Even in the crowd at this afternoon's reception he was absent-minded and silent."

Padre Veroni broke off a cluster of long white grapes, before he spoke. "It is the same old story—reform and all that. He has an idea that the Church has lost her former simplicity and earnestness; that he cannot consent to make the Church the supreme and final arbiter in all questions, even those of doctrine. He wants to think for himself and decide for himself."

"There are a good many others like him in the world," remarked the cardinal, raising his glass so that the light shone through the ruby liquid. Then he drained the wine to the last drop.

"Yes, that is true. But why can't he think what

THE JESUIT

he pleases, believe what he pleases, and stay in the Church?"

"As some of the rest of us have," responded the cardinal dryly. "For my part, I think all this agitation is foolish, a waste of time and a tremendous wear on the nerves. Life is too short for us to try to solve the mysteries, and the Church very kindly and wisely takes the responsibility off our shoulders. But some men are not built on this plan. Fools are not all dead yet. Does Don Paolo wish to leave the priesthood?"

"O, no. He has not gone as far as that. He is groping and doubting and struggling."

"He needs more to do. He needs to have his ambitions aroused. Is he a man of ability?"

"Of great ability. He is one of the most eloquent preachers I have ever heard."

"Have him appointed special preacher during Lent, in one of the most popular churches, and it will excite his pride and arouse him. Take him frequently to the Vatican and let the Pope see him often."

Padre Veroni hesitated. "I am afraid the disease has gone deeper than that, Eminenza, and cannot be eradicated by such measures, but I will try."

"He is a favorite of yours?"

"I love him as though he were my own son, Eminenza. His mother, the widow of my cousin, a noble woman, gave him into my charge when she

THE JESUIT

died. He was then ten years old, a cheery, bright boy, who soon grew to love me. I educated him at the Monastery of —, and trained him for the priesthood. To my knowledge, he is thoroughly upright. Until a year or so ago there never was a cloud between us. Then I found that he was reading heretical books. I reproved him, perhaps more severely than was wise, and punished him by refusing to say farewell to him or holding any communication with him during my absence in America. On my return, the Abbot told me that Paolo had continued that which I condemned, but from the liberal, socialistic views had begun to interest himself in atheism, a natural sequence. I decided to adopt other tactics, made friends with him again, and tried to take him with me to social gatherings such as that today. The evil has gone deep."

"Has he read Fogazzaro's book about reform in the Church?"

"I believe he has. I saw it in his room."

"Has he taken any special interest in the evangelical religion?"

"Not to my knowledge. His great desire seems to be to tear aside the veil of mystery which the Church has thrown around various doctrines, and to learn for himself."

"There lies his extreme danger," continued the cardinal, rising from the table. "To think for oneself is the essence of rebellion. The Church is our mother and thinks for us."

THE JESUIT

Padre Veroni knelt before the cardinal, and kissed his hand.

"Until we meet again, Eminenza," he said.

The cardinal smiled slyly.

"So the marquis is not to marry the fair American?" he asked.

Padre Veroni avoided meeting his glance.

"I do not know," he replied.

"How much did you say her fortune is?"

"A million francs."

"Do she and her sister manifest any signs of coming into the fold?"

"Not as yet, Eminenza. I do not think, in fact, I am positive, that Miss Lapeer does not like me or Lady Eger either. She is a girl of strong character and has a will of her own. Also, she is a Protestant of the most difficult type to reach, like Sir John."

"And the other?"

"It remains to be seen."

"By the way, I have some tickets for the celebration of the Immaculate Conception, on December 6. Would you care to have them for Lady Eger and the others? The seats are in the front row and very near where the Pope will celebrate mass."

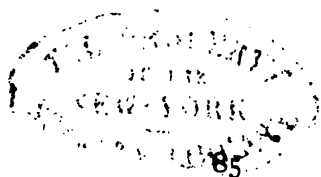
"If you can spare half a dozen, I can use them all," replied the priest. "Good night, Eminenza."

The cardinal paced deliberately up and down the long corridor. Frescoes which had seen the passing of three centuries were on the ceiling above his head. How many plots and intrigues had been formed

THE JESUIT

within these walls! The men who had made them had long since been laid in eternal rest beneath altars or in high niches, where their tombs were surmounted by peaceful effigies in marble, figures with folded hands and limbs laid straight, and cardinal's hats hung, faded and old, above them. The Vatican walls had stood while a long procession of popes and cardinals had lived their lives, leaving behind them the results of good or ill. Their influence lived still in the Roman Catholic Church and in many instances had contributed in making it what it is today—a political machine, powerful, far-reaching, with its center in the Vatican, and just enough remaining of the former truth and purity of the early Church fathers to permit it to hold sway over the spiritual natures of the people who bow at its altars.

“A million francs!” mused the cardinal. “The Convent of Our Lady of Sorrows needs a fresh endowment. Ah, well, we will see. Stranger things have happened, and every means available must be used in the interests of the Church.”



CHAPTER IX

FRA ANTONIO threw bits of bread at the green crested parrot whose perch was near the door of the Monastery kitchen.

"Art never satisfied, greedy bird?" he asked, sharply.

The parrot cocked an eye at him so impudently that the monk was forced to laugh.

"An-co-ra!" croaked the parrot in tones of command, and Fra Antonio meekly threw him another piece.

"There, that is absolutely the last, Frou-Frou. Thou needest not scold. I will not give thee more."

"Let me feed him," said Don Paolo, who had come quietly up behind the monk. "Isn't it a glorious day, Fra Antonio? Your favorite heathen gods must be reveling in the sunshine and delicious air. I believe it was Pan you invoked the last time I was here, when the grapes were still on the vines."

Don Paolo's face was no longer sad and wistful, but mischievous.

"Thou art as impertinent as the parrot, Paolo. No, he cannot have any more to eat. He will die of acute indigestion some day, or have a fit. Yes, thou wilt, thou wicked bird," he continued, shaking his finger at the chattering parrot. "Look out!

THE JESUIT

He'll bite thy finger off if thou goest too near him! I don't see why we keep him anyway. He never even catches flies, let alone does any useful work."

"Don't be so cross, good Brother Antonio. After I have finished my errand to the Superior I am going out into the open country on the Campagna, where the little pink-tipped daisies make a soft carpet for my feet, and the birds sing a morning hymn to the sun. If I were a heathen, I believe I'd be a nature worshiper—it's all so beautiful."

"Didst ever write poetry, Paolo?" asked the monk, so solemnly that the young priest laughed again.

"I don't mind telling you that I tried once, Brother Antonio, but I was not successful. Would you not like to go for a walk, too?"

Fra Antonio shook his bare head. Stooping he gathered some dead leaves from the stalk of a white chrysanthemum.

"No, I don't want to go. Except when the Superior has sent me on an errand or for some special purpose, I never go outside these walls. Here is my world and one that I love, too. Art leaving so soon, Paolo? How goes thy work?"

"I'll tell you another time, Fra Antonio. Your god Pan is playing on his pipe out yonder and is calling me. Addio!"

"What a boy he is!" thought Fra Antonio, watching the straight black figure until it disappeared in the light shadow beneath the olives.

THE JESUIT

"Happy youth, our playtime! Now, when one is as old as I am, with rheumatism in my joints and forced to bend over in the garden or in the chapel, one has reason to complain. Since he is reconciled to Padre Veroni I do not believe that lad has a care in the world, still less a sorrow."

Utterly ignorant of the conflict which was rending Paolo's soul, and which was then driving him relentlessly to seek the solitude of the open Campagna, Fra Antonio bent to his labors among the flowers and vegetables, work which he dearly enjoyed in spite of all his grumbling. To produce the most perfect rose, the most spotless lily, the finest vegetables, was Fra Antonio's ambition; and, indeed, there may have been worse ones and more harmful, over yonder behind the gray walls of the splendid Vatican palace. Since he entered the Monastery as a young man Fra Antonio had been entirely contented with his lot, and had apparently never made any effort to inquire below the surface, accepting his food and drink as a part of his due, and praying in the chapel night and morning with the regularity of a machine.

Don Paolo walked out the gate of San Giovanni near the Church of Saint John Lateran, past the stands of the market woman, where late grapes in white and purple were piled in abundance, and went briskly out into the open country. Soon leaving behind him the overcrowded tenement houses, occupied by hundreds of poor people because the

THE JESUIT

rents are cheaper outside the walls, he struck off to the left, away from the noise and confusion, from the jingling bell on the tram going to Frascati, and sauntered through a by-path. Along the side, in the grass, were the pink-tipped daisies of the field, growing by the thousand. He picked a few and held them in his hand as he walked, as though their freshness and beauty rested him and soothed his troubled spirit. It is only the man wrapped up in self and selfish interests who cannot feel the restful power of nature and of nature's God, speaking to him through the wonderful objects which he has created. Pascal's sister wrote: "I was admiring just now a little landscape presented by my room, as it was being illuminated by the rising sun. How pretty it was! Never did I see a more beautiful effect of light upon the paper, thrown through painted trees. It was diaphanous, transparent. It was almost wasted on my eyes. It ought to have been seen by a painter. And yet, does not God create the beautiful for everybody?" Something of this thought was in Don Paolo's mind as he marked the lavish profusion of these dainty blossoms, each one perfect in itself, blooming on the lonely Campagna, merely to be seen by the passing peasant in his winecart, or by the occasional pedestrian.

Emerging from the sidepath the priest passed out into the high road. The Campagna lay spread out before him, a dull, brown field, stretching far, far

THE JESUIT

away to the line of faint blue mountains on the horizon. Here and there were ruins of old castles, or fortresslike houses, with only one or two small square windows high up, near the roof. Long-horned cattle grazed near and lifted their heads as he went by.

There was a rumble and a toot. The priest pressed up to the roadside to avoid disaster, as a huge automobile rocked toward him. It stopped suddenly, a little beyond him, and the driver alighted to examine one of the wheels.

Don Paolo went slowly on, knowing that he could not be of the slightest service if a breakage had occurred, as he had never been in an automobile in his life and had an idea that they were uncanny machines, liable to explode at the least provocation. Still, it seemed discourteous not to make some offer of assistance.

The gentleman who was bending over the wheel raised his head just as Don Paolo arrived on the scene.

"It's all right," he said cheerfully, nodding to the ladies in the vehicle. "Nothing is broken."

Another man had stepped to the ground and stood looking on, with his hands in his pockets.

"Get in and we'll go on," said the first man, proceeding to jump into his seat.

"It's Don Paolo!" exclaimed a voice which sounded familiar. "What are you doing so far out in the country? You must be a good walker."

THE JESUIT

"I am, Lady Eger. I was tempted out by the fine weather."

Don Paolo removed his broad beaver hat with its narrow cord of black and stood bareheaded at the side of the motor car.

"I say, Hamilton, suppose we ask him to go with us," suggested the Marquis di Cassini. "Poor chap, he looks as if he needed a change. See the hollows in his temples and the blue veins in his forehead."

Sir John nodded acquiescence and the Marquis said: "Jump in, Don Paolo. We're going for a spin around the mountains and have a free place. Get in, quick."

Don Paolo hesitated. He had a faint idea that it would not be very dignified for a priest to fly through the country in an automobile. In fact, he had a lingering remembrance of a certain prohibition against the use of such undignified vehicles, issued by the Holy Father himself. It was a great temptation. The sun, the soft air, the blue line of the hills held out alluring charms, and he suddenly decided to yield to his desire.

"I will go," he said, smiling at his own daring.

In an instant he was in the car, the marquis had put on full speed, and the Campagna was but a blur of brown, so rapidly did they get over the ground. Both Sir John and the marquis were in front and Don Paolo, to his embarrassment, found himself facing Lady Eger and Janet.

THE JESUIT

"Have you forgotten me, Don Paolo?" inquired Janet.

"By no means, Miss Lapeer."

"Then you have met Don Paolo!" exclaimed Lady Eger, surprised.

"Only once. My sister is the young lady beside you, sir, Miss Fay Lapeer.

After all, it was not so embarrassing as the priest had feared. The ladies talked among themselves in English, occasionally exchanging remarks with Don Paolo, just enough to make him feel at ease. He, true to his priestly habits, drew a small breviary from his pocket and began to read, glancing up at times to see how much distance they had covered.

They climbed the hill to Frascati, leaving the road at a point near the town and striking off to the right. The olive groves were thicker now, vines hung over the old gray walls of the villas. Sharply pointed cypress trees were above the walls, the green of their lacy leaves looking black against the deep blue sky. On and on they went. The grade became steeper.

The marquis pulled up sharply in front of an imposing iron gate in the wall. It was opened at once and the car rolled through it, and passing under rows of dark ilex trees, through which the sun could not penetrate, he guided the auto to the door of a white villa and stopped it.

"What a surprise!" said Fay, "where are we, Marquis? Is this a fairy villa?"

THE JESUIT

"Will you alight, ladies? This is my property, and I trust you will consider yourselves in your own home."

"It certainly is a delightful surprise," said Lady Eger. "I did not know you had a villa here."

"We do not come to it very often; at least, my mother does not. She prefers our castle in the Abruzzi. My sister Floria and I love this place."

"She is the one in the convent, isn't she?" asked Fay, whose romantic fancy was seized by the villa and its beautiful grounds.

"The same. She is to be allowed to come home by a special dispensation after Christmas, and then I hope you will see her. She is my favorite sister. Come in, ladies. Pina, show the ladies to a room where they can rest, if they wish, before luncheon, which we will take out here on the terrace."

The marquis indicated a broad porch paved with black and white blocks of marble and surrounded by a marble railing, over which tea roses were growing in wild luxuriance and were still full of blossoms.

Sir John and the marquis walked to the end of the terrace and, leaning on the rail, looked down upon the park spread out before them.

"It's a fine place you have here, Marquis."

"I'm glad you like it. I have kept it in perfect order because I like to run away from Rome sometimes and spend a few days here."

"I wonder whether you feel as I do," replied

THE JESUIT

Sir John. "I can't breathe in Rome. It smothers me. It is history piled on history, century piled on century. The Romans are bound by custom. It oppresses and stifles me."

The marquis laughed softly.

"I do not think it affects me in that way. I was born there, and brought up to know nothing else but these restraints, which I suppose do strike a stranger as oppressive. I love the country, however, and there are times when I want to be alone, to think and dream and plan. There isn't much time for that in Rome."

"We have forgotten the priest!" exclaimed the marquis, suddenly. "He's gone off for a walk. I must go after him. He'll think me very rude."

"I'll stay here and smoke, if you don't object," said Sir John.

A servant arranged a table on the terrace, spread it with a white cloth, and brought out the necessary dishes, casting glances of curiosity at the tall Englishman who still leaned on the railing.

"Was ever anything more lovely?" remarked Janet, beside him, and he threw his cigar down into the grass.

"It's like a bit of an old book, isn't it? And yonder goes the peacock. See how vain he is and how he struts along and shows his fine tail. I can't imagine an Italian villa without a peacock. It was a pleasing idea of the marquis to bring us here."

THE JESUIT

"And the old sundial! O, Sir John, what time is it? I want to see how near the shadow which has crossed that dial for hundreds of years comes to the modern time piece."

"I suppose the dial ought to be exact, as the sun regulates it, Miss Lapeer."

Sir John followed Janet with long strides, as she ran eagerly to the dial.

"See the beautiful lizard—like a mass of emeralds in the light!"

"You are the first young lady I have seen who did not run when she saw a lizard, and cry, 'O, Sir John, see that horrid thing!'"

Janet looked reproachfully at him. "It isn't very nice of you to express such views about my sex, although I appreciate the compliment, I assure you I do. What time is it, please?"

"Half-past eleven."

"And the dial says it is noon. Your watch isn't right, Sir John."

"You make me think of a story I read the other day. An Irishman had a watch he considered a perfect timekeeper. He was traveling in Switzerland and climbed to the summit of Pilatus to see the sun rise. Watch in hand, he waited for the orb of day to appear. Finally, he got impatient. 'By my watch, it's time he was here!' he exclaimed. 'And begorra, if he waits another half minute, he'll rise behind time!'"

"What are you two laughing about?" called

THE JESUIT

Lady Eger. "The marquis says you must come back. Luncheon is ready and I'm so hungry, after that delightful ride over the Campagna. Do hurry, John."

Time seemed to stay its course that day at the villa. The peacock spread his fanlike tail and shrieked out his strange, piercing call to his mate down by the sundial. The flowers nodded sleepily on the old gray wall. The water in the fountain fell softly and musically into the basin below, where calla lilies grew in a profusion of foliage, and masses of ferns crowded each other in tropical luxuriance. Luncheon served, Lady Eger leaned back in a rattan chair and closed her eyes for a siesta. Janet noticed how tired she looked, as they went down the marble steps leading from the terrace to the garden, following the owner of this charming villa, the priest, and Fay.

Sir John turned back. "I will come at once," he said. "Please go on slowly, and I will overtake you."

Janet watched him cover his sister with a light, gay-colored silk blanket, and then, when he stooped and kissed her good-by, she hurried on with a strange new feeling in her heart. Sir John was so strong, and Janet, who, at home, had been accused of a tinge of woman's suffrage and emancipation views, felt peculiarly weak and helpless here in Rome. The very air was laden with intrigue and plot and counterplot, which a woman's mind could

THE JESUIT

not penetrate, and locked doors which her feeble hand could not open.

When Sir John joined her they went on together in silence and soon came upon the priest, standing where the full breadth of the beauty of the Campagna lay before him.

"Isn't it like the sea!" exclaimed Janet, clasping her hands. "Down yonder as we came from Rome it seemed barren and brown, except for the great white patches of daisies. Up here it has a blue haze like that over the Mediterranean. Rome—where is Rome?"

"Over there," replied Sir John, indicating a gray cloud several miles away. "There lies Rome."

The priest said not a word at first, but was absorbed in the beauty of the scene.

"Where is the marquis?" inquired Sir John, in response to a searching glance which Janet cast down the shady path ahead of them.

"He and Miss Fay went on," replied the priest, drawn from his reverie, "but I—I could not."

"You have doubtless been in these mountains many times, Don Paolo," said Janet.

"Yes, mademoiselle. But the view is always wonderful, more wonderful each time."

"It makes me think of the prairies," remarked Sir John.

Janet nodded. Her mind was with Fay. Ought she to follow her?

While she was making her decision the English-

THE JESUIT

man threw himself full length at the foot of an enormous umbrella pine. The priest with a motion invited Janet to a seat on an old stone bench, in the shadow of a drooping vine, and he continued to stand, with his delicate white hands half hidden beneath his black gown.

"You are going to see the Pope, mademoiselle?"

"Yes, Don Paolo. We expect to have a private audience soon. Padre Veroni is to let us know the proper time."

"You see him often, do you not?" inquired Sir John.

"Very frequently. I am every day at the Vatican, by orders of the Holy Father. He has shown me much favor."

Don Paolo sighed as he spoke, as though the favor of Pius X might be more of a weight than a blessing to him.

"One must be so very particular at the Vatican," he added, hastily, as if to explain the sigh, "and one must take much heed to his words, a very little expression of opinion is repeated as if it were of great importance. Several times I have been severely reprov'd for matters which I considered of no consequence. I would prefer to be a priest in a small village in the heart of the Appenines, than serve daily at the Vatican."

Sir John laughed, and there was the reflection of a smile on Don Paolo's face.

"I am unwise to talk to you, I know, but you

THE JESUIT

are Protestants and my words will not be repeated—certainly not to Padre Veroni,” he said, with a sharp glance at Janet.

“Certainly not,” she responded, promptly, reading his glance. “The Jesuit priest does not like me—nor I him,” she felt like adding, but desisted for wisdom’s sake.

Don Paolo was more at his ease.

“I know that I express only what many of my colleagues think without putting into words. I am more frank—shall I say more reckless? At the Vatican there are wheels within wheels. Everything leads to something else. It is like a huge game.”

“With religion left out,” remarked Sir John.

Don Paolo’s eyelids quivered slightly.

“Of all the gamblers I ever saw, the priests are the worst, and the most unscrupulous, and have ever been so,” continued Sir John, sitting up and running his fingers through his hair, a sure sign for him of excited interest. When Sir John talked he did not mince words.

Janet held her breath. This was bold language to a priest.

“They gamble with men’s souls and reputations and aspirations, and the prizes are ambition and luxury and show. Not all do this. There are good and holy priests who live righteous lives and serve God in meekness, but they are usually in the end the tools of the others. The whole system is

THE JESUIT

wrong. The Church of the fathers was pure and upright, but look what the popes have added to it—the confessional, the worship of the Madonna, the doctrine of the infallibility of the Madonna, the doctrine of the infallibility of the Pope, and last, but in my mind one of the most harmful, the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin. When Pius IX could not find any other means of attracting the people he promulgated a new dogma, and in a couple of weeks it will be celebrated gorgeously here in Rome. I tell you, Don Paolo, though I suppose I ought to beg your pardon for doing so, as we have broken bread together, I tell you, the system is wrong! Where does the beautiful gospel of Christ come in, and his atonement for our sins? Where is our Mediator? Is it Mary, the honored mother of our Lord? Is it the saints, is it the priests, or the Pope? No, no. It is none of these. ‘For there is one God, one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all.’ ‘Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name given among men by which we may be saved; for at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow.’ One cannot find a passage in the Bible where it justifies the worship of Mary, or the dogma of her Immaculate Conception.

Don Paolo’s face had grown very pale. His hands trembled. He held them out to feel for something tangible, something he could grasp. His faith in

THE JESUIT

the Church had long been undermined, it was now slipping from him. He was like a drowning man, who had lost his hold on the board which had supported him and feared to perish.

"Is that true?" he stammered.

"True! Of course it's true, man. Read your Bible and you will find out. It's the principle, the system of your Church which is wrong, Don Paolo; it is the system of men and not of God."

Don Paolo stretched out his hand to Sir John, who grasped it warmly. "I believe you are right," said the priest earnestly and fearlessly; "but what will take its place?"

Sir John looked closely into his face. "If you really mean that, come around and see me," he said.

"I must go and find Fay." Janet sprang up, her conscience troubling her for having forgotten her sister.



CHAPTER X

THE marquis and Fay were alone in a pretty little bower formed by bowlders of rock and heavy ivy vines, the growth of many years. To the Italian it was a novel sensation. He had never been alone with a young lady before. The faithful chaperon was always within sight or hearing of her charge. He felt slightly embarrassed at first, but seeing how absolutely at her ease Fay was, he sat down and prepared to make the most of his opportunity. One thing must be clearly understood, the marquis was a thorough gentleman, from the crown of his glossy head to the toe of his patent leather boot—of extremely small size in proportion to his height. Although the Italian was insignificant in stature when standing beside a giant like Sir John, he was by no means a pigmy, being taller than Fay Lapeer. He had no intention of saying anything which could embarrass the young lady left so unexpectedly alone with him. Mrs. Lapeer had told him that in America young ladies decided questions for themselves. His instinct told him that he must win her heart before he could ask for her hand.

Fay began the conversation.

"I suppose the others will be here in a moment, Marquis. How soon must we return to Rome?"

The marquis consulted his watch.

THE JESUIT

"In about two hours, I think. We ought to start by half-past four and it is now three o'clock. Are you in a hurry to leave?"

He smiled at her, and she turned away her eyes; there was that in his which she did not wish to meet.

"I could stay here forever," she replied, and the delicate rose color suffused her face.

The marquis was hot-blooded; the life of sunny Italy ran in his veins and made him impetuous. This was no common love which had come to him, but an adoration for a type of woman he had never met before. His judgment, however, warned him that it was too early to speak.

"I love the place too. Have I ever talked to you about my sister, Floria, Miss Fay?"

"I knew that she was in a convent."

"And has been for several years. When she was born my mother dedicated her to Our Lady of Sorrows because she thought the Virgin saved her life by a miracle. Since she was a tiny girl she has been receiving religious instruction. She is not like the rest of us, dark-skinned and dark-eyed; she is like a rose from the north, fair-haired, with white complexion, and a pretty bloom in her cheeks. For a long time we could not tell where she got her coloring. Then we remembered that our great-grandmother was an Englishwoman. Her portrait hangs in the villa yonder. Would you care to come and see it?"

THE JESUIT

"Indeed I should like very much to see it."

Slowly they went back through the shady alleys to the terrace, where Lady Eger was still seated.

"I am ready to go when you are," she called, "but Miss Lapeer and Don Paolo and my brother have disappeared entirely."

"I want to show Miss Fay a picture," replied the marquis, passing into the house.

Lady Eger looked after them with a smile and returned to her book, which had lost interest to her. The letters danced in hopeless confusion, and she put up her hand to wipe away a tear.

"Here she is, Miss Fay, and Floria is her image—the same broad forehead, the same lovely, innocent blue eyes, the same sweet mouth."

The dame of a century before was depicted sitting on a carved stone bench in a park, evidently the very one in which they had been that afternoon. At her feet lay a greyhound with delicate head lifted toward her. One hand rested on his head. A gown of blue silk, richly trimmed with Venetian point-lace, fell in full folds around the girlish form.

"We made Floria dress up in it once," said the marquis. "The gown fitted her exactly. The lace was yellow with age. How beautiful she looked! O, God!" he exclaimed with such ardor that Fay started with surprise. His eyes were full of tears.

Involuntarily she held out her hand to him.

"You love her very much?"

"I do and I curse the day when my mother forced

THE JESUIT

her into a career for which she has no love, no desire. It is heartless, wicked, and I do not believe God ever meant her to be shut up for life in that convent. Sometimes I feel that I must go and take her out. My mother and I have had many bitter words about it. Her fate is inevitable."

"And if by the sacrifice of one several souls should be saved, what then?" said a voice behind them, a voice so constrained that they scarcely recognized it as belonging to Lady Eger.

"That one should not be Floria," the marquis replied, slowly, but with strong feeling, as he turned and faced the speaker. "There are many who wish to enter a convent, who have a vocation. Let them go and bury themselves and say prayers from morning till night, though for myself I believe there is more grandeur in living and fighting the battle of life side by side with our fellow-men."

He looked like a true scion of the nobility, did this heir of an old Italian family, standing there with head erect, nostrils expanded, and body tense with feeling.

In spite of herself, Lady Eger's eyes were full of admiration, and on Fay's cheeks burned two bright red spots. It was time to put an end to this scene which, while impressive, was liable to lead to results quite different from those desired by Lady Eger and Padre Veroni.

The loud toot of the auto sounded. The big vehicle crunched on the hard road by the door.

THE JESUIT

"Get your hat, Fay, we must be off or we shall not be home in time for dinner," said Lady Eger.

The ride across the Campagna was a quiet one. The stress of deep emotion felt by every member of the party caused a silence which after a while became oppressive. Very swiftly they descended a steep hill. The shadows were already darkening under the olives, but on the Campagna the sun still shone warmly.

About half way to Rome there was a loud "zat-bang," and the auto stopped. Despite the seeming misfortune every one breathed a sigh of relief, for the mishap served to break the uncomfortable nervous strain of the party. Sir John and the marquis jumped out to examine the machinery. Don Paolo, knowing as little of machines of any sort as he did of the Hottentot tongue, sat still, but Fay joined the two men.

"I've often driven an auto at home; perhaps I can be of some assistance to you," she said.

While they were waiting at the side of the lonely road the sun suddenly dropped below the horizon and immediately that chill which so characterizes a semitropical country was felt.

"How cold it is!" Janet shivered. "I think I'll get out too, Lady Eger, and walk about a little."

Don Paolo and Lady Eger remained in the car.

The loud whirr of another auto coming from the

THE JESUIT

mountains behind them sounded and the car drew up beside them.

"Broken down, eh?" called a pleasant voice.
"Can we give you any assistance?"

The marquis stood upright, having been down examining the front part of his machine.

"No, thank you," he said, then catching his breath, he quickly removed his cap, and Sir John did the same, bowing profoundly to the small man in the other automobile.

"Pardon, your majesty," exclaimed the marquis.
"I did not recognize your majesty at first. I have not yet found the breakage, but no doubt shall do so soon. I think it is nothing serious."

Janet and Fay were leaning against the automobile, wondering what personage of distinction this man could be. They could not understand Italian. Lady Eger sat motionless, but the priest, after a moment's hesitation, rose and stood, removing his beaver hat, a black figure against the red sky. A lady sat beside the gentleman. Her face was very sweet and gentle and her eyes were large and dark, resembling those glorious eyes of Eastern dames, celebrated in poetry and song. Beckoning with a slight movement of her hand, she motioned the marquis to come nearer, exchanged a few words with him, glanced with some curiosity at the two American girls, and bowed slightly. The gentleman gave a military salute, pulled his gray cap over his forehead, and whirled on toward Rome.

THE JESUIT

"Who was it?" asked Fay.

The reply took her breath away—it was so unexpected: "The king of Italy and Queen Elena!"

"Is it customary for them to do such kindly acts?"

"Yes, Miss Lapeer. King Victor Emmanuel is both the sovereign and the man, and, more than that, he is always a gentleman. He is an expert automobilist and rarely uses any other vehicle when he goes out for pleasure. I have met him and the queen many miles from Rome. But I must attend to this business, or we shall not get home tonight, and Mrs. Lapeer would have reason to forbid your going out with me again." He smiled at Fay and bent again to his task.

The priest sank back into his seat, knowing that Lady Eger was regarding him with disapproval. No doubt she would tell Padre Veroni that he had risen and removed his hat to the king of Italy. Well, what did it matter? A little more or a little less, it was all one. The blame would fall on him some day and experiences were crowding in upon Don Paolo, crowding so fast that they bewildered him.

"We've found the break," announced Sir John, "and we can mend it, but we shall have to drive very slowly, for the repair can only be temporary."

The marquis's face was very red when the job was finished and he wiped the perspiration from his brow.

THE JESUIT

"If it were anything but an automobile," suggested Fay, mischievously.

"I should not work so hard, eh? You are right. When I was down on the ground trying to peer into the machine I heartily longed for Beppo, my good chauffeur, and wished I had brought him along."

Laughing, he assisted her in, sprang into his seat beside her, and they crept toward Rome. It was not very cheerful out there on the Campagna. Night had enveloped the fields in complete darkness, although the white road gleamed before them. The marquis had to keep a sharp outlook for the empty carts returning from the city.

"The drivers go sound asleep under the queer covers," he explained to Fay once when he was obliged to turn out sharply, "and let their horses find the way home. Naturally, they take the middle of the road. Are you warm enough?" he inquired, solicitously.

"Perfectly so," replied Fay.

They crept on through the darkness. Sir John, meantime, entertained his companions with stories about the king.

"I had the honor of an interview with him once, being presented by the British ambassador. He greeted me with the utmost simplicity and conversed freely with me. He and the queen are very fond of the country. They have a villa near Rome to which they send their children every fine day with their

THE JESUIT

governess and nurses. Ever since Princess Jolanda was born an English lady, Miss Dickens, has been in charge of the royal nursery and at least two of the nurses are Protestants."

Fay leaned over the back of her seat. "A lady was telling me such a pretty incident the other day, about the king. He was going away on an important visit to one of the cities, and was driving by her house in state, surrounded by the splendid, tall corazzieri. A general in full uniform sat by his side. Suddenly the king rose to his feet and waved his hands vigorously. Amazed at such an unusual proceeding, the lady looked and saw another carriage coming from the other direction. On each side and behind the carriage were bicyclers. I suppose they belong to the secret police. In the carriage were the royal children, dressed in white, with broad sailor hats on the back of their heads. They waved a farewell and threw kisses to their father. I've just loved the king ever since," she added, enthusiastically.

Neither Lady Eger nor the priest had taken any part in the conversation. Lady Eger shivered and her brother drew her wraps more closely about her.

"We'll soon be home now. The lights are more frequent. Yonder is the gate."

Mrs. Lapeer had finished her dinner when the be-lated automobile drew up at the door. Although much worried, she determined not to yield to imaginary fears. When her daughters entered they

THE JESUIT

found her seated in her own room, trying to be interested in the latest novel from Piale's circulating library.

"My darlings," she cried as they both fell upon her and kissed her affectionately.

"Were you much worried, mamma? Our automobile broke down half way across the Campagna," said Janet.

"We've had such a glorious time, a perfect day, luncheon in the most romantic garden you ever could imagine, and on the way home, we saw the king and queen! They stopped to speak to us. I'll tell you all about it after dinner."

Fay ran gaily downstairs. As Janet started to follow her mother said: "Mrs. Potter was here today, dear, and she wants you to be sure to come around tomorrow to see her. I do not think she is very well."

"All right, I will go."

"And, Janet," Mrs. Lapeer detained her with a light touch. "She thinks you resemble a dear daughter whom she lost years ago. That accounts for the fancy she has taken for you."

Janet kissed her mother again. "You are the sweetest mother in the world!" she said.

"Thank God for my girls!" was the reverent and fervent response.

CHAPTER XI

THE Pension Speranza was full of guests. Every room was occupied. A large delegation of priests from America had already arrived to attend the coming festa in honor of Maria, Vergine Immacolata, and besides other tourists had come in on the midnight train. When the Lapeers went down to breakfast, they found the tables in the dining room well filled. The one at which Padre Veroni usually ate alone was changed for a larger one, around which eight priests sat, enjoying their coffee. They were a jolly crowd. Three of them were undoubtedly Irish, and jokes flew merrily from one to another.

Rising with a noise of pushed-back chairs, the priests made a conspicuous group in the center of the room. Waiters rushed frantically forward to assist them and the tourists looked up from their breakfasts with unconcealed interest. Lady Eger was not there. She and Sir John always breakfasted in their private sitting room, and often Lady Eger did not feel equal to rising early and had her coffee and roll and egg served to her in bed. She was visibly growing more frail, and Sir John was greatly troubled about her.

Padre Veroni and one of the priests exchanged a few words, then moved toward the Lapeers' table.

THE JESUIT

"Padre Smith, Mrs. Lapeer."

To the lady's surprise, the American priest held out his hand, smiling most blandly.

"You probably do not remember me, Mrs. Lapeer; but I have seen you many times. I am from Clyde, Illinois."

In a moment Mrs. Lapeer found herself conversing with the priest with as much ease as if he were an old friend.

Janet slipped away from the table, leaving her mother and Fay talking with the two priests, who were soon joined by some of the others. Their account of the festa which was soon to take place with much pomp and ceremony thrilled them both with expectation. When Padre Veroni assured them that some of the best seats would be reserved for them, by order of Cardinal Perotti, they expressed their delight in no measured terms.

A gentleman and his wife, at a neighboring table, observed this little scene with much astonishment.

"Isn't that Mrs. Lapeer, Mary?" asked the gentleman.

"It certainly is."

"And Father Smith," chuckled Mr. Gray.

"I never could have believed it if I had not seen it myself!" exclaimed his wife. "Imagine the amazement of our friends at home, when they hear that our first sight of Mrs. Lapeer, vice-president of our Ladies' Aid Society, teacher in the Sunday school, was when she was talking to some

THE JESUIT

Roman Catholic priests. Wonders will never cease!"

Mrs. Gray held up two small, plump hands in the air to show her disapproval.

Her husband chuckled again.

"Mrs. Lapeer," called Mrs. Gray, as that lady, with a conscious smile of gratification, started to leave the room. She fancied that even the waiters looked more respectfully at her and her dignity rose accordingly.

"Mary Gray! How delightful! and your husband, too. I am so glad to see someone from home."

"I was not aware that you knew Father Smith," interposed Mr. Gray, smoothing his gray moustache, while his eyes twinkled with mirth.

Mrs. Lapeer grew rosy.

"How in the world did you get in with those priests, Grace?" inquired Mrs. Gray, with curiosity.

"We met Padre Veroni on the steamer."

"Which one was he?"

"The tall Italian priest."

"The one in the gown," added Mr. Gray.

"Yes; with the ivory-tinted face and straight features."

Mr. Gray chuckled again, then changed it suddenly to a cough.

"He's going to get us splendid seats for the big festa of the Immacolata early in December."

"What's that?" asked Mrs. Gray.

THE JESUIT

"Well, I don't just know myself. It has something to do with the Virgin Mary. A great many bishops and cardinals are coming and the Pope is to appear. It will be splendid. The papers are full of it. I'll try to get you tickets, through Padre Veroni."

Mrs. Lapeer felt her dignity and importance more than ever. She had been in Rome almost two months and already felt as experienced as an old Roman.

"Don't bother about getting any for me," hastily interrupted Mr. Gray. "Mary can go if she likes. I suppose you women enjoy those shows. That is why they have them. I prefer a regulation theater myself. I came to Rome to find out what is doing, how the Liberals feel and all that. No old fossils for me, thank you."

"Do come into our room for tea about four this afternoon, Mary," urged Mrs. Lapeer, not deigning to reply to Mr. Gray's bald declaration of opinion.

She remarked to Fay, as they went upstairs: "I always knew that Henry Gray was brusque and outspoken, but I think he was positively rude this morning."

"What are they trying to do with Grace?" asked Mrs. Gray, anxiously. "Do they think they can make a Catholic out of her? Why, she comes from the best old stock. Her father was a minister and his father before him. Why are those priests so friendly?"

THE JESUIT

"The Lord only knows, Mary," replied Mr. Gray, with unconscious irreverence. "Probably they do want to convert, or pervert, her—I like that word best—and she has lots of money. It would pay them, Mary. I came to Europe for an interesting time, and I believe it's beginning right here in Rome."

Mrs. Potter was at home that morning, when Janet at last found an opportunity to pay her the promised visit. She was sitting sewing in her apartment house. It was in the old part of the city, surrounded by palaces, whose walks could tell strange tales of romance and tragedy. The six flights of stairs were a long, hard pull, and Janet stopped on each landing to get her breath. She was panting still when the maid opened the door of Mrs. Potter's room and stood aside that she might pass in.

"You are out of breath, my child, and I suppose you wonder why an old lady like myself chooses an apartment up under the roof when she might have one in a modern house with a lift. There are two reasons. One is that I have lived here many years, and as time rolls over our heads we love the familiar corner and our own particular easy chairs. Another reason is—but I'll show you later."

She was a very garrulous woman, and Janet did little more than say "Yes" and "No," while Mrs. Potter talked of the summer passed in the Appenines with the cardinal's sister. She showed some

THE JESUIT

photographs of the old man, sitting under the shade of a chestnut tree in his garden, his broad hat resting on his knee.

"A dear old man is the cardinal, and his sister is one of my closest friends. When I am there I always attend mass regularly in the parish church. The opposition made by Protestants to the Roman Catholics is most obnoxious to me. Now, look at our friends, the Pierces. Lovely people! as refined and cultured as any I ever met, but they regard these matters in a way which I cannot approve. My natural instincts would be to go to the other extreme from any form of ritualism or show, but I have lived in Rome for many years, and I cannot see why the Protestants should try to convert the Roman Catholics. This is the religion best suited for the people who love color and music and art, and all these they find in the Catholic Church."

Janet was astonished. Sir John Hamilton had not talked this way—but he was an Englishman; he had his prejudices. Still, Don Paolo was a priest and knew all the inner workings of the Church. She remembered his white face, drawn with emotion as he said to Sir John, "I believe you are right." Then there was the Marquis di Cassini. Janet was beginning to feel a real respect for him. He had practically stated that the Church, as it existed today, was not suited to the people—and both the marquis and Don Paolo were Italians.

THE JESUIT

"Come upstairs and see why I prefer to remain here rather than seek another home."

Mrs. Potter led Janet out of a door opening on a broad terrace, flooded with sunshine and crowded with potted plants. Janet would have paused to see the view but Mrs. Potter led her on, up a few steps of concrete, to a small flat roof on the top of the house. Here were more flowers and vines and palms, a miniature garden with a small curtained summer house, having a table and chairs in it.

"Now look to your heart's content," commanded Mrs. Potter.

"How beautiful it is!" exclaimed Janet, unconsciously lowering her voice almost to a whisper.

She was high above Rome. Below was a mass of irregular red and brown roofs from which rose tall church spires of various forms in which great bells hung motionless. Domes were molded on a background of deep blue, Saint Peter's dome and cross, vague in the blue haze which veiled it, were, as ever, the most conspicuous objects. Far beyond the roofs rolled the Campagna, monotonous as the sea; and beyond the fields were circles of blue mountains.

"Signorina Massimini wishes to see Madame," called the maid from the foot of the stairs.

"The cardinal's sister! I must go down."

"May I stay a moment, Mrs. Potter?"

THE JESUIT

“As long as you please, my dear.”

Janet sat down in a chair and absorbed a view which is unique in the world. The silence up here, high up above the bustle and din of the city, was oppressive. Suddenly a puff of smoke rose from the summit of Monte Mario, a cannon boomed heavily, and simultaneously the bells in the steeples clanged out the noon hour. A little one in a tower close by rollicked and swung back and forth with such a jolly sound that the feeling of oppression passed away and Janet smiled. The whole world seemed to have become joyous and mirthful. The clang of bells ceased as rapidly as it began. Having said good-by to Mrs. Potter, who was talking volubly with another elderly lady, very plainly dressed in black, Janet ran down the long steps and made her way homeward.

A little back from a busy street, through which great vans rumbled, carrying heavy loads, and crowds passed on their way to work or pleasure, stood a small unpretending church. Janet entered it to rest. She enjoyed stopping at these churches, hidden between high buildings. They were quiet, restful, and shadowy. This one was very simple in its decorations, and only half of the square room was reserved for worshipers. A high and very elaborately wrought iron railing divided the church, and on the other side were plain oak benches, with kneeling stools in front of them. It was absolutely silent in the church. One of the peculiarities of

THE JESUIT

Rome is its sudden transitions from brilliant light to deep shadow, from extreme heat to penetrating chill, from the noise of the streets to the quiet of the churches. The heavy leathern curtain shut out all sound of the world, its hurry and its busy, anxious life.

Before the altar, where a red light burned in a silver lamp, knelt a nun, her face upraised to the picture hanging above the candles and other decorations. Janet watched her closely but saw not a motion or a quiver. She might have been carved in marble, in her absolute immobility. A rustle of garments was heard and another nun entered. The one kneeling arose, made a genuflexion before the altar, and left the church by a side door, while the second nun knelt in her place.

Janet had been so engrossed in watching the singular movements of the nuns that she had not noticed the other persons in the church. There were only three besides herself: a peasant woman, with a tiny sleeping child, which she had laid on the cane seat of a chair beside her, an old man who carefully spread a gay bandanna handkerchief on the cold pavement before he knelt down, and a lady dressed in deep mourning, who was on the other side of the aisle, a little nearer the iron railing than Janet was sitting. There was something familiar in the turn of her head, the stylish veil and the small hand, bare, with several costly rings upon it. Idly wondering who it could be, Janet watched her and was startled

THE JESUIT

to see that her body shook with noiseless sobs. She was evidently in great distress and was seeking relief on her knees in the quiet little church. With delicacy of feeling Janet ceased to look at her and a few moments later rose to leave the church. At the same moment the lady dropped her light veil over her face and met Janet in the hall. It was Lady Eger! Unless she was so blinded by her tears that she could not see, she must have recognized Janet, but she made no sign, and as Janet passed out behind her she saw Lady Eger enter a closed carriage which was driven rapidly away.

Lady Eger did not appear at luncheon and Sir John ate alone.

"Could you come in to see my sister at tea time?" he asked Janet afterward. "She wished me to invite you."

"With pleasure."

Janet showed her surprise. Fay had become a constant visitor to the sitting room, but Janet had not felt free to go unless she received a special invitation.

"Fay, also?" she inquired.

Sir John shook his head. "She only mentioned you, Miss Lapeer. I am very anxious about my sister. She grows weaker every day; she is grieving herself to death. If I could only persuade her to leave Rome and come out to my ranch, it would make a new woman of her. But she will not do it. Neither will she see a doctor. Do you

THE JESUIT

think you could—" his eyes finished the sentence eloquently.

Janet understood.

"I will do my best," she replied.

"How would Lady Eger look?" she asked herself, as she waited an instant at the sitting room door. The picture of a slender figure, shuddering with sobs, a tear-stained face, was vividly before her mind.

"Come in!" called a gay voice. "Ah, Miss Lapeer, it is good of you to come and see me! My big brother says that there is a chill in the air and I must not go out this afternoon. And he is such a tyrant! I suppose he must be obeyed."

Was this the grief-stricken woman who knelt in the old church? Janet could scarcely believe it. Gowned in an exquisite gray princesse dress, which bore the imprint of Paris in its flutings and dainty laces, with hands laden with sparkling jewels, and an elaborate coiffure fresh from the hands of Monsieur Dupont, who came daily to arrange my lady's abundant, fine black hair, Lady Eger was as gay and vivacious as ever. But as Janet sat down near her she saw that there were pathetic dark rings under her eyes and a sad droop to the mouth.

"I just wanted you today, Miss Lapeer. I have grown to know Fay well and a dear sweet girl she is, but today I wanted you all alone. I want to get to know you, for I feel we could be friends, you and I."

THE JESUIT

She was very winning in her manner, a charm which Janet had long felt would be irresistible if Lady Eger ever tried to exert it over her.

"Somehow I felt you would understand," she continued, leaning suddenly forward and seizing Janet's hands. Her eyes were hungry with longing for that which would never return.

"I wanted you especially today, because—because—it is just three years since Arthur died!"

A great sob shook her body again, but her tears refused to flow.

Janet stooped to kiss her, moved out of herself. Lady Eger needed her help; she should have all that she could give.

"I think I understand," she whispered, softly, smoothing the waves of hair, the creation of Monsieur Dupont, away from the white forehead.

"I have felt so alone. I cannot talk to John, he is so big and strong and worries so over me. I have no woman friend. I think it was that which drew me to the Roman Catholic Church. I could pray to Mary, the mother, who had suffered; there was a link between us. She knew how I felt, how empty my life is, with my husband dead and my baby snatched from my arms just when I needed him most. You did not know I had a baby? Here is his picture. His father died first, was killed while hunting, just three years ago today. And my boy was six months old then. He lived a year, and then God took him. My heart was hard against

THE JESUIT

God then. Dear John came and took me away, or I think I should have gone insane. We came to Rome, where I met Padre Veroni. He guided me to the Church, but I do not know whether it was so much his influence as that of a picture I saw in a country church up in a small village perched on the very top of a mountain. It represented the mother of Jesus and in her arms lay a tiny child. The expression of her face was so womanly, so motherly, that it touched me greatly. Here was someone who could feel what I had felt, through whose heart the sword had gone. She had borne a Son and had seen him lie dead. She would understand. So I went to Mary and told her all my sorrow. It was the Madonna who drew me into the Church and I believe it is she who attracts and holds many women."

Janet remembered what Mr. Pierce had said: "Remove from the Roman Catholic Church the worship of Mary and you remove the backbone of its influence. The power of the adoration of the Virgin keeps thousands of women in the Church."

"I do not know why I tell you these sorrows of mine. We each have our own burden to bear and, for the most part, one must bear them alone. 'Laugh and the world laughs with you, weep and you weep alone!' is but too true. Still, I felt that you had lost someone dear to you—that you could sympathize."

"Dear Lady Eger," replied Janet, finding her voice at last, "you have paid me the greatest possi-

THE JESUIT

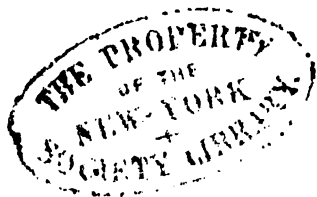
ble compliment. If I can help you, let me do so. May I ask you one question—has your new faith brought you peace?”

An expression of pain crossed Lady Eger's face, but before she could answer there was a tap at the door.

“Come in,” said Lady Eger.

“I will go to my room a moment, Janet—do you mind if I call you that? We are almost the same age, you and I, though I have been wife and mother. Put the tea here on the table, Angelina. Miss Lapeer will serve it.”

Two gentlemen came in a few moments later to find a cheerful hostess, with a brow free from care, apparently as witty and charming as ever. But Janet observed the trembling hands, the occasional quiver of the lips, like a grieved child, and the delicate blue veins at wrist and temples. Lady Eger looked like a woman whose hold on life was gradually loosening; the shadows of its twilight were gradually enveloping her.



CHAPTER XII

"STAY to supper, do, dear, and Graham will take you home before ten. We can telephone to your mother so she will not be worried. You know we are holding special services in our church and you will be interested in hearing our pastor speak, even though you may not understand what he says. He is considered the most eloquent speaker among all our evangelical ministers in Italy."

Janet hesitated.

"She who hesitates is lost," paraphrased Mrs. Pierce, reaching up to pull out a couple of hat pins.

"I may as well yield gracefully, Alda. The temptation is too much for me. It seems so much like home, and I love baby so. Come here, you darling, and let me cuddle you."

Janet drew a low rocking chair up in front of the tiled fireplace, moving slowly back and forth, while little Alda leaned against her, soothed by the warmth and the gentle motion. Outside a cold autumn rain was falling. November was doing its best to keep up its reputation for gloom and general unpleasantness. Janet sat contentedly watching the blue flames shoot up the sides of the well-seasoned logs, cheerily crackling as they glowed.

"She's gone to sleep," announced Mrs. Pierce, removing the baby.

THE JESUIT

"So she has. Alda, I do so hate pensions! If it were not for mother and Fay, I should be tempted to run away to Naples—take the first steamer home, though it couldn't be home without mamma and Fay."

Mrs. Pierce sat down beside her with her work.

"Now's the time to commune, when it pours down out of doors and there's a cheerful fire within. What's the special trouble, Janet?"

"I don't think there is any special. It's new and strange and bewildering here in Rome, and sometimes it makes me afraid. The Speranza is as comfortable as can be but the atmosphere is peculiar—I don't like it."

"Why not move?"

Janet stretched out her hands to feel the warm glow of the fire before she replied, and then she spoke slowly. "Mamma and Fay do not feel as I do," she said. "They like it and enjoy seeing the priests and talking about functions at Saint Peter's."

There was a pause. Mrs. Pierce devoted herself to making little Alda's dress and a gust of wind drove the rain hard against the windows.

"There's another matter which troubles me, perhaps, more than it should. Do you know the Marquis di Cassini?"

"I have seen him. He is a deputy and a liberal, although his mother is a rabid clerical."

"Yes. He wants to marry Fay, Alda. He spoke

THE JESUIT

to mamma about it. And I think Fay likes him; at least, I am afraid she does. He is an attractive man, and intelligent; I like him myself very much, but I do not want Fay to marry him. I fear that he is an atheist."

"Like so many men here in Italy. Becoming incredulous of the doctrines of the Roman Church, they oppose the priests in everything, and finally end by believing in nothing at all. That is one of the reasons why we are here. The gospel has power to touch the hearts of these men and lead them to Christ."

Mr. Pierce entered and rested his arms on the back of his wife's chair. "I want to tell you of an interesting incident," he said, "Alda has known of such cases before, but I fancy that to you, Miss Lapeer, it will be something unique. You remember that priest who left the church a year ago. Alda? He is working in a machine shop outside Porta Pia. Yes? Well, it seems that he has a sister who is in a convent up in the country. She's a young girl, about sixteen, and was placed there by her mother. It is one of the convents which the nuns never leave after they take the veil. The pupils are, however, allowed a little freedom. They go out to walk each day. In some way this child managed to communicate with an old nurse of hers, whom she loved very much and through her she has sent several letters to her brother. The last one came today and he brought it down to show it

THE JESUIT

to me. He is extremely anxious to help his sister escape, but fears it cannot be done, as he is very poor, earning only a few francs a week besides his board and a rough bed. I tell you, Miss Lapeer, the friends in England and America labor under a terrible mistake. They cannot see why evangelical work is necessary in Rome and Italy. The people are Christian already, they reason. The Roman Church is all they need. And then they say that our converts recant at the last, that they come to us only for what they can get out of us, and all that. In some cases I acknowledge that they do recant—a sign that they were never touched by the spirit of the gospel. Some of them *are* mercenary, but these gradually drift away when they find out that we do not pay them for coming to church, as our enemies report that we do.”

“Not really!” exclaimed Janet.

“Didn’t you know that? Certainly, that is one of the least of the reports which are circulated about us. Of course we are supposed to have the evil eye, and the poor people make horns with their fingers behind our backs when we approach. I had a letter from a man just the other day who said he was in great need, and if I would send him five hundred francs he would be quite willing to ‘make himself an evangelical.’”

“How absurd!”

“Isn’t it? Yet, until they learn better, that is all they know about Christianity and the gospel. But

THE JESUIT

I have gotten switched off from my story. That money business always irritates me, Miss Lapeer. I have seen many men and women die in the evangelical faith since I have been in Italy, and die fighting against great odds, too—poverty, separation from their families, even the loss of their good name. One of our members, a young woman, was afflicted with a cancer and was obliged to go to a city hospital for a severe operation. The nurses are nearly all nuns, and they urged her to repent of her backsliding and confess to the priest. She refused to do so. They told her that this illness was sent upon her as a visitation of God because she denied her faith. She still refused to recant. Our pastor visited her and prayed with her in the poor ward and the patients gathered around, and even a passing friar stopped to listen. Every day the pressure on her was continued, but she constantly refused and her patience and sweetness won for her the love and respect of her fellow-sufferers. After the operation was successfully performed and she was able to leave the hospital, she said good-by to those with whom she had been associated for many weeks. ‘If your religion makes you so patient,’ they said to her, ‘we believe in your faith.’”

“It’s a beautiful incident,” said Janet. “I had no idea you were really accomplishing so much here.”

“We are not accomplishing it, Miss Lapeer,” said Mr. Pierce, with a quiet smile. “It is God! If the work be of God, it will prosper.”

THE JESUIT

"Now for the letter, Graham. I am very curious about the little girl in the convent. It seems so sad, and romantic, too."

"Of course, I was digressing again. Here it is. I will translate it freely:

"November 1, 19—.

"DEAR BROTHER: I received thy letter which brought me bad luck. The Mother Superior heard of it and made a terrible scene in the convent. For two days I have been punished. Mamma heard of the affair, and they told me she was very angry and called down curses upon thee. I am now watched more than at first and my letters are opened, so I beg thee not to write to me at the convent but to Palmira [the servant]. I assure thee that I can rely upon her.

"Thou wilt understand that I am in a terrible situation. The nuns are mostly kind to me, but are shrewd. They have told mamma a sackful of lies, and one nun, who hates me bitterly, has said that she will have me sent away from the convent. If she only would!

"In February I shall enter the novitiate. Imagine how heavy my cross is! I am praying to the Lord that thou mayest soon find some way for me to escape this terrible fate. I swear to thee that I will not bring thee any sorrow, that I will be upright and good. Do not doubt it.

"When thou writest send some stamps, for I have no more and the nuns have even forbidden me these.

"I am writing in haste in the midnight hours. The silence makes me afraid. I am alone in my cell. Woe to me if they should know that I am writing to thee! Comfort me and send me good news. I have wept so much. I will tell thee all about it another time.

"I implore thee to secrecy with everyone if thou wishest me to live. Farewell! Farewell! Farewell!

"From thine unfortunate but always affectionate sister.

"N. B.—Write to me soon, and address the letter to Palmira."

THE JESUIT

"It is the letter of an undisciplined girl, that is evident, but she is sincere in her longings for freedom," added Mr. Pierce.

"But she certainly has no vocation," said his wife.

"Supper is served, signora."

"Very well, Ursula, we will come at once."

"And for lack of a few francs must this child spend her life in the convent?" asked Janet of Mr. Pierce, pausing a moment at the door of the dining room.

"Yes, Miss Lapeer."

Janet was quiet and thoughtful all through supper. Finally she said: "Has the brother any plan for releasing her from the convent?"

Mr. Pierce looked up interestedly. "O! you mean the priest. Yes, he wishes to go to the village, find the servant she speaks of, Palmira, and take the girl away when she goes for a walk, hoping to manage it unobserved."

"Then he will bring her to Rome?"

"Yes."

"How much would it cost?"

"I think one hundred and fifty francs would be enough. But she would need clothing also."

Janet was silent for a few moments. "Suppose I should provide both," she said, finally, "do you think her rescue could be accomplished?"

"Why, yes, most probably," replied Mr. Pierce, taken aback by the sudden and unex-

THE JESUIT

pected proposition, "but could—would you do that?"

"I can and will do it," said Janet, quietly. "Will tomorrow morning be early enough for me to send the money to you?"

"Quite early enough," replied Mr. Pierce. "But before anything is done about it I will make inquiries to be assured that the story is correct and that she is a girl of good character."

"Then I shall wait until I hear from you?"

"Yes, Miss Lapeer, and thank you very much."

He turned to his wife. "We must get ready for church, Alda," he said, "or we shall be late."

The spacious hall where the Protestant services were held was full to overflowing when Mr. Pierce and his wife and Janet entered it. The minister sat in an arm chair on the platform, resting his head upon his hand. Janet could not see his face until he rose to give out the first hymn, Luther's masterpiece:

A mighty fortress is our God,
A bulwark never failing:
Our helper he, amid the flood
Of mortal ills prevailing.
For still our ancient foe
Doth seek to work us woe;
His craft and power are great,
And, armed with cruel hate,
On earth is not his equal.

The splendid volume of sound rolled forth from the organ and from hundreds of strong voices.

THE JESUIT

Here, in the heart of Rome, surrounded by the many Roman Catholic churches where sweet singers rendered in the most artistic manner the music of Palestrina, and of Don Perosi, the talented priest composer, the sturdy hymn of Martin Luther reverberated, out through the open windows until it attracted the attention of those who were passing. They crowded into the room, some standing at the door, afraid to venture further, others, bolder, made their way down the aisle and forced those seated upon the benches to move up and make room for them. Among those who heard the hymn was a priest who was sauntering leisurely past the church. He hesitated, looked at the sign over the door, "Chiesa Evangelica," and, finally, followed a man in the garb of a laborer into the room. He stood near the entrance while the last verse was sung, seemingly unconscious of the glances of curiosity from those around him. To see a priest in an evangelical church was not actually unheard of, although a very uncommon sight.

That word above all earthly powers—
No thanks to them—abideth;
The Spirit and the gifts are ours
Through Him who with us sideth.
Let goods and kindred go,
This mortal life also:
The body they may kill:
God's truth abideth still,
His kingdom is forever.

THE JESUIT

A stillness fell upon the congregation. In low, penetrating voice the pastor talked with God as if he were indeed present in that place. Don Paolo involuntarily shielded his eyes with his hat. He remained standing until the pastor stepped to the side of the pulpit and began to speak freely and without notes, quietly but directly to the audience; then the priest slipped into a vacant place in the last row of benches, and listened intently.

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” For half an hour the slender, pale-faced man in the pulpit held the breathless attention of his audience. Seldom was his voice raised above a conversational tone, but his own intensity was so powerful that it drew the people to him. His style was fine, his classical references unique and finished, his rhetoric perfect, but those alone were not the characteristics which impressed his hearers; it was his absolute conviction that he was an ambassador for Christ—as a representative of his Master he brought them the gospel message.

These points were specially dwelt upon—the divinity of the only begotten Son, the fact that whosoever believed in him should be saved, and the final consequence of this belief, everlasting life. He made no attack on the Roman Church, but preached the love of Christ and his atonement for our sins. There was no mention of Mary, the

THE JESUIT

mother of Jesus, except once, when he referred to her as the virgin mother.

Don Paolo drank in the words of the gospel as a thirsty man quaffs the water from a spring. To him they were new. He had known of Christ all his life, the Christ of the mass, the Christ upon the crucifix, suffering and bleeding, the stern judge before whom his mother knelt and prayed that he would not condemn poor sinful men. But of the living Christ, who bends over this lost world in boundless love, who saves a sinner by his grace and fills his heart with his holy Spirit, Don Paolo knew little, though he had been years in the Monastery.

While they were singing the final hymn he left the church, walked a short distance up the street and returned. The room was now almost empty and the janitor was extinguishing the lights. A small group of people still stood near the altar. They moved toward the entrance and two ladies and a gentleman passed out. They were speaking English. Don Paolo stepped behind a column and stayed there till they passed by. The last one to leave the hall was the pastor.

Don Paolo went resolutely up to him and laid his hand on his arm. He was so desperately in earnest that he forgot the usual polite preliminaries and came straight to the point.

"I must talk to you. I heard your sermon to-night. I want to know more of the evangelical religion. When and where can I see you?"

THE JESUIT

The pastor glanced at the priest's black robes.

"Are you ready to come to me in broad daylight? My rooms are over the church."

"I am ready."

"Very well. Come tomorrow at three o'clock."

With a cordial clasp of the priest's hand, the pastor left him to go home to his apartment in the lower part of the city. As one in a dream he threaded the winding streets unconscious of those around him. The die was cast. He knew that when he entered the home of an evangelical pastor's house, he would draw upon himself reproof and perhaps disgrace. What did it matter? The bishop's miter and the cardinal's hat, for which he had once longed, grew dim in his mind. He had long sought the truth—could he find it in the gospel? He knew the four Gospels, for he had learned and read them in Latin for many years, but it had never occurred to him that they meant anything personal to him. The Church was the mother of all her members; her will prevailed; her voice decided what the doctrines should be; to her was the final appeal. A curious sense of liberty came to him as if someone had freed him from bonds. The words of that last verse of Martin Luther's hymn rang still in his ears:

Let goods and kindred go,
This mortal life also:
The body they may kill:
God's truth abideth still,
His kingdom is forever.

THE JESUIT

Was this the way John Huss felt when he was condemned and put to death? Did Savonarola go forth to death from his tiny cell in the Palazza Vecchio in Florence with this strange, buoyant feeling of freedom? "The body they may kill: God's truth abideth still," he repeated. Then, for the first time, he lifted his soul in direct prayer: "O God, help me to find thy truth!"



CHAPTER XIII

DON PAOLO opened with his latch key the great "portone" of the house where he had an apartment, and went up the two flights of stone steps. At intervals, in niches in the deep wall, small brass lamps were set, having tiny wicks nourished by olive oil. They served to make the shadows darker.

Entering his sitting room he lighted a student lamp, drew a chair up to the table, and taking a Latin translation of the New Testament from the well-filled book shelves he opened it and began to read, not critically, nor indifferently, but intently, from this new standpoint of his soul's salvation and his earnest desire—nay, longing—for God's truth. If the evangelical faith should prove to be his faith, he could well understand what Luther felt when he wrote that hymn. Goods and kindred would go; in some cases the acceptance of the Protestant faith had meant death. All his friends were in the Roman Catholic Church. They would consider him a traitor. His name would be accursed in his own family.

His Aunt Rosina, his mother's sister, had been so proud that he should take orders. She had taught his cousins to kiss his hand, in spite of his remonstrances. Aunt Rosina was coming to Rome from the country, with her oldest son next week, to attend

THE JESUIT

a celebration of the Festa of the Immaculate Virgin. He knew just how she would look, with her dear, honest face, wrinkled and lined with hard work and much poverty. She would wear the black silk gown which her husband had given her years before, and a string of coral beads, and over her abundant black hair she would drape a lace scarf. He had promised to get a chance for her to see the Holy Father; then, she said, she could die happy.

He could imagine her joy when she saw him in the procession among the younger priests, for Pius X desired his presence. If he became a Protestant, would she curse him—her own nephew? She hated the heretics and said they cast spells over the children in the school. And Padre Veroni?

Don Paolo refused to allow his thoughts to roam further, and began to read again. All night he bent over the pages of the book, and when the dawn broke in the east, and the first rays gilded Saint Peter's dome, rising wraithlike from the mists, he threw himself down on his narrow iron bed, and slept quietly until his old housekeeper aroused him when she brought his customary cup of black coffee.

Of the days which followed Don Paolo never had a very distinct remembrance. He went to visit the evangelical pastor and talked with him for two hours, promising to return each day at the same hour. Together they studied God's Word, and Signor Berini patiently taught him and explained

THE JESUIT

passages which were not clear to him. More and more eagerly Don Paolo absorbed God's truth, and as he did so his path of duty was pointed out to him. It was very narrow and straight and hard, but the Saviour would walk with him. Don Paolo took no pains to conceal his visits to Signor Berini. Three o'clock in the afternoon was a very conspicuous hour for a priest to enter a Protestant building—Signor Berini had fixed that time as a test. Signor Berini soon assured himself that Don Paolo was sincere. He had nothing to gain by becoming an evangelical; he had a great deal to lose. Already his name was spoken in Rome as that of a promising young priest, a favorite at the Vatican, a protegee of Padre Veroni, and a remarkably gifted speaker.

The festa commenced on Saturday. Don Paolo decided not to make a final break with his early associations until after the celebrations were over. Perhaps he would feel differently. Perhaps the services would recall him to his senses and show him that his longing for soul liberty was but a dream which had no fulfillment. Aunt Rosina was coming then. He would wait.

It was one of these mornings when Don Paolo was so disturbed in his mind that a note was brought to Janet. It told her of the serious illness of Mrs. Potter, who had suffered a stroke of paralysis and desired greatly to see her. The writing was cramped and the English was incorrect.

THE JESUIT

"It is written by the cardinal's sister, mamma, the old lady I told you of. Were you going out today? Do you need me?"

"Mrs. Gray and I were going shopping."

"Then I am sure I shall be of no use," responded Janet, smiling.

"You dear old Janet! You are the worst bargainer in Rome," said Fay. "What do you suppose she did the other day, mamma? She wanted to buy some buttons and instead of going to a first-class place, she stopped at the little stand down here on the corner where the cripple girl is."

"And paid double price?" asked Mrs. Lapeer.

"Precisely!"

"It was raining," protested Janet, "and she looked so cold."

Fay put her arm around her. "I wish we were all like you, dear, and then maybe we should see our duty more clearly."

There was a peculiar note of sadness in the words which startled Janet. Fay had not been acting like herself lately. She had grown thin and pale and the gaiety had gone from her eyes. Was there anything troubling her? A vague fear seized Janet. Rather than have Fay suffer she would prefer to see her marry the marquis, if that were her heart's desire. But lately she had excused herself several times when he called and had taken refuge with Lady Eger, whose cough kept her closely confined. She had never been well since the

THE JESUIT

drive across the Campagna in the chilly November air.

Janet took Fay's face between her hands and examined it with anxious care.

"You are not sleeping well," she said, accusingly.

Fay nodded.

"And you eat like a bird. Don't think that I have not noticed your failings, miss. You shall have a doctor tomorrow."

"No! No! I am perfectly well. A little tired of sight-seeing. That's all. I'm going driving with Lady Eger, it's such a fine morning and we are going to see the convent where Floria di Cassini is."

"Poor girl!" exclaimed Janet.

"Do you think so? I don't. I think it must be the extreme of happiness to live such a life of consecration as that. Good-by, Janet. Don't you worry about me. I'm all right."

Janet pondered several matters on her way to Mrs. Potter's. The cold, spicy air from the mountains was an intoxicant to her. She felt as if she could walk miles without being tired. Fay's mention of the convent had reminded her of the little girl in the country convent, who was so weary of the life and wanted to escape from it. Poor little creature! Sixteen years old and shut in from this beautiful world! Couldn't she serve God as faithfully without being confined in a cloister? There was Floria di Cassini too. Perhaps she longed to escape, but dared not. In both cases it was the

THE JESUIT

mother who forced the daughter into the convent! They did not go from a sense of duty. God pity them!

She had sent her money to Mr. Pierce, but had heard nothing more. She decided to stop there on her way and see if there was any news.

"No, none," said Mrs. Pierce. "Her brother left yesterday, but we may have to wait some time before she can get away. Graham wrote to the mayor of the little town and got the best possible report of the girl. She is of good character and was much beloved by those who knew her before she entered the convent. Can't you stay longer? Going to see Mrs. Potter? She is very ill and I am sorry to say has two nuns for nurses. No doubt they were sent by the cardinal's sister."

"Aren't they good nurses?" inquired Janet.

"First-class. But Mrs. Potter is a Protestant and I hate to think of her being surrounded by Roman Catholics in these hours which may be her last."

"What harm can that do, if she is a Protestant?" persisted Janet.

"Wait until you have lived five years in Rome and you will find out," said Mrs. Pierce, sending Janet away slightly indignant, with a feeling that her old friend regarded her as a child in experience.

This antagonistic spirit still possessed her when she saw the nun, dressed in spotless white, and with a white veil on her head, bending solicitously over Mrs. Potter.

THE JESUIT

"I think she is lovely," she thought. "So clean and sweet. If I were ill, I should like to have her nurse me. She is so picturesque and pretty. Alda is really a little prejudiced. I suppose she can't help it. She sees only the worst side. Besides, if Mrs. Potter is really conscientious in her religious views, I don't see what harm a cheerful, sweet nurse like that can do."

The nurse could not speak English, but she bowed and smiled, and, rising, made a place for Janet beside Mrs. Potter's bed.

It was true that Mrs. Potter was very ill, and Janet found her able to speak only a few words. The doctor looked grave when he came in with the cardinal's sister.

"She has relatives in England, hasn't she?" he asked.

"Yes. A nephew, I believe."

"Better send for him. Is he her heir?"

"How should I know her private affairs?" the cardinal's sister replied, tartly.

"I beg your pardon," the doctor said, and taking the patient's hand once more he carefully counted the feeble pulse.

A few days later Mrs. Potter's nephew, a middle-aged man from Edinburgh, arrived. Mr. Potter had never been out of his native land, was a Scotchman to the backbone, and had firm convictions as to what he considered right. The first sight of the nuns shocked him, and he thus expressed himself

THE JESUIT

later to Mrs. Pierce, when she called to see how Mrs. Potter was getting on: "You could have knocked me down with a feather. They wear rosaries at their belts, they actually do, Mr. Pierce, I assure you, and medallions with Mary's face on one side and Pope Pius X on the other."

"They are said to be excellent nurses," said Mr. Pierce, trying to console him.

"No doubt, no doubt; but, sir, they are Romish. Had my poor aunt been in her usual health, she would never have permitted such a thing. It's the cardinal's sister who did it; I cannot remember her name. It's a jaw-breaker. She is very sly, and I am sure, sir, that she is a viper, a viper, sir!" Mr. Potter solemnly paced the floor in his agitation.

"Then neither nurse speaks one word of English, and I have to receive information through the cardinal's sister, and very vague information it is. I fear greatly that my poor aunt is near her end. It's a serious matter, Mr. Pierce, a very serious matter."

Mr. Pierce agreed with him on this point. The cardinal's sister was not in the house all the time, but when she came she assumed command, and Mr. Potter was obliged to stand aside, though he glared openly at the sight of the slim woman in black.

"Would you like my wife to come?" asked Mr. Pierce.

"It would be a favor if she would do so occasionally, and Dr. Meredith, my aunt's pastor, is most at-

THE JESUIT

tentive. But my opinion is, sir, that when these papists get hold of a person they hold on like grim death. There's that in it which I cannot understand. How did my aunt get so intimate with that cardinal's sister that she dares come in here and regulate everything and everybody?"

"She has been in Italy many years—" began Mr. Pierce, but the other interrupted.

"What of that, man, what of that! Does being in this country make people fools? Does Rome fascinate and hoodwink them into believing that black is white?" he snorted with disdain.

Before Mr. Pierce could reply the maid announced in awe-struck tones: "His eminence, the Cardinal Massimini!"

Mr. Potter stopped short in his rapid paces and faced the prelate with the air of an infuriated animal, but before the calm dignity of the old man his rage subsided.

"I have come to inquire how Mrs. Potter is today," he said. "Do I speak to her nephew, who was summoned by telegram?"

"You do, sir. Potter is my name," was the gruff but not rude reply.

It was difficult for anyone to be rude to this aged cardinal, with his kindly face. It was not that of an intriguer, and yet, Cardinal Massimini loved his Church above all earthly loves, and would do much to further her interests.

"Very glad to meet you, Signor. You have had

THE JESUIT

a long journey. I hope you found your aunt better."

Mr. Potter was visibly melting. His duties as host recalled him to his position as head of his aunt's household.

"Pray, sit down, Cardinal. This is Mr. Pierce."

The name was familiar to the cardinal and he bowed coldly.

"I regret to say that I did not find my aunt improving."

"I am very sorry, Signor. For many years Mrs. Potter and my sister have been friends, I may say intimate friends, in spite of the differences in nationality and religious views." The cardinal smiled broadly and Mr. Potter said to himself: "He is a good old chap! I need not have been afraid of him."

"Mrs. Potter spent last summer at our country home, in the Abruzzi. The peasants adore her and call her the 'good English lady.' They will sorrow when they hear of her illness."

Mr. Potter was won. The cardinal was his aunt's friend; he should be received as such. After some further conversation on general subjects the cardinal rose.

"It would not be possible for me to see Mrs. Potter, I suppose?" he asked, tentatively.

"Certainly, sir. Perhaps your sister is there now."

With lamblike gentleness Mr. Potter led the car-

THE JESUIT

dinal into his aunt's room, stayed a few moments and then courteously left the room. Mrs. Potter was alone with Cardinal Massimini, his sister, and the nun.

The next morning, Mr. Potter appeared in Dr. Meredith's study in a great state of excitement. He had risen early as was his usual custom, and prepared to leave the house about six o'clock for a constitutional before breakfast. The apartment was dark and quiet but the outer door was wide open. Not wishing to disturb his aunt, he went softly by her room, the first one near the entrance and down the stairs. In front of him were two figures, moving slowly and conversing in low earnest tones. As he drew nearer he saw that one was a priest, the other a woman who wore a white gown and a white veil. At first he thought little of it, but when he reached the last flight, and the woman turned and faced him on her way upstairs, he recognized her as one of the nuns who was nursing his aunt. She was plainly startled at seeing him and glided quickly by.

Mr. Potter passed out into the street and walked up on the Pincio. The early hour found few people abroad. Here and there a working man could be seen going to his daily tasks, and some bakers' boys drawing their carts were visible. The gas light flickered in the lamps along the streets. The Scotchman's brain worked slowly but surely. That was a very odd thing which had occurred. Why were the priest and nun on the stairs at that hour

THE JESUIT

of the morning? Was it by appointment? Why was the door of the apartment open? Why did the nun carefully shut the great "portone" after the priest passed out? He had been obliged to push back the lock for himself, as the porter was not yet up. Mr. Potter walked briskly around the Pincian Garden twice, so engrossed in his thoughts that he scarcely noticed the gradual breaking of day, the twittering of the birds in the branches of tall trees, the waving of the palms in the south wind. Suddenly, he stopped, took off his hat to rub his bald head and started at a good pace back to the place from which he came.

Dr. Meredith was already busy in his study when Mr. Potter entered, and held out his hand to him in cordial greeting.

"I trust there is no serious news about your aunt," he said.

Mr. Potter was greatly agitated.

"I do not know. I am much disturbed. This is what has occurred." He recounted the incident of meeting the nun and priest on the stairs.

Dr. Meredith meditated. "It is not unlikely that the nun admitted the priest to your aunt's room. Is she conscious?"

"Only at intervals. The cardinal was there yesterday. She seemed to recognize him."

"If you can wait ten minutes while I drink a cup of coffee, I will come with you."

"Drink coffee with me," pleaded Mr. Potter,

THE JESUIT

whose agitation was plainly augmented by the other's words.

It was only a short time before Dr. Meredith reappeared. Then he suggested the wisdom of telephoning to the physician, asking him to come at once to Mrs. Potter's apartment.

"It would be wise also to have another witness who speaks both Italian and English," he said. "Let us go around by the Evangelical church and take Mr. Pierce with us. He is a man of good judgment and tact."

Soon the three gentlemen were seated at the breakfast table in Mrs. Potter's pleasant dining room, where the walls were decorated with rare bits of majolica, plates, cups, and vases, collected in various parts of Italy during a residence of forty years.

"It may be that I was mistaken," said Mr. Potter. "The nurse may have been obliged to converse with the priest for some reason connected with her religious duties."

"It is possible. We shall try to get at the truth, although I assure you, Mr. Potter, it will not be easy. The doctor can do more than we can. We will explain the circumstances to him and let him act as he thinks best."

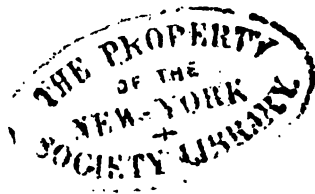
"But is he not a Roman Catholic?"

"By birth and training, yes. His wife is a Protestant and he has a large practice in the English-speaking colony. I do not think that he is at

THE JESUIT

all a religious man, but he has strong convictions with regard to obedience on the part of his nurses. If it is true that the nun admitted a priest to Mrs. Potter's room this morning, he will be exceedingly angry."

"The doctor is here," announced the maid.



CHAPTER XIV

THE doctor listened quietly to Mr. Potter's statement.

"I will inquire into this," he said when the former had finished. "These nuns are usually reliable. At least, I have found them so. But our position here in Italy is a peculiar one. In the first place, our views and opinions are different from those which you foreigners hold. In many things we believe that the end justifies the means. We have been trained in this point from infancy; the family confessor taught it to us when we learned our A B C's. As a nation, gentlemen, we are naturally noble and upright. If you find other attributes among us—intrigue, dishonesty, untruthfulness—do not blame the Italians. Blame the Jesuits whose influence ever has been felt in Rome for three hundred years."

"I believe you, Doctor!" exclaimed the two clergymen at one time.

"But I thought the Jesuits had been expelled from Rome and Italy," continued the bewildered Mr. Potter.

The doctor shrugged his shoulders. "Others have believed the same. Where does the general of the order, the Black Pope, live? Here in Rome. For the present his headquarters are in the German College, but I understand that the order will soon enter

THE JESUIT

its own building once more. Who rules at the Vatican? Does the Pope? Not a bit of it! The Jesuits are behind the throne, just as they were when the astute Leo reigned. I am neither a foreigner nor a Protestant, gentlemen, I am an Italian, and know whereof I speak. And thousands of Italians know the same. We speak plainly, too, and without fear. I have understood that the strong statements which are made publicly here in Rome would cause a riot in England or America. Talk about the return of the temporal power of the Popes! It can never be. The Italians will never permit it. We are free and we shall remain free."

"Amen," said Mr. Pierce.

The doctor remained silent for a moment. Mr. Potter noticed that he wiped away a tear. To the loyal Italian the welfare of his country is near to his heart.

"Now to business," he continued briskly. "If there is any clerical meddling here, I'll find it out. The nuns are here for nothing but their nursing duties."

Fifteen minutes later he opened the door again.

"It is my duty to inform you, gentlemen, that Mrs. Potter has grown decidedly weaker. It is only a question of a few hours. Whether or not this is due to some special excitement I do not know. I shall now question the nurse. Mrs. Potter has lucid intervals. Perhaps Dr. Meredith would like to converse with her, but I beg that you will await my

THE JESUIT

return. Would you be so good, Mr. Potter, as to take a seat by your aunt's bedside? It may be some comfort to her."

Mr. Potter left the room and Dr. Meredith and Mr. Pierce conversed together in those subdued tones which one involuntarily employs in a house where death is near. Half an hour passed and the doctor, accompanied by Mr. Potter, entered.

"Please come with me," he said, and they all passed into Mrs. Potter's drawing room, which held so many memories of the personality of one who had occupied it for many years, that it almost seemed as if she, herself, were actually present.

The nun was standing in the center of the room. She did not look up when the gentlemen came in, but they noticed that her face beneath the white veil was flushed.

"She has told the truth at last," remarked the doctor, dryly, "after considerable evasion, not to call it by a harder name. This is the night nurse. The day nurse has just come in, and is with the patient. Would you like to ask her any questions, Dr. Meredith?"

But to further questioning the nun refused absolutely to reply. She respected no other authority than that of the physician and was suspicious of a Protestant clergyman.

"You may go, Suora (Sister)," the doctor said, curtly, and the nurse left the room. "This is what has happened, as well as I can ascertain from the

unsatisfactory replies," he continued. "She told me no more than she could help. It is true that she opened the door to the priest about five o'clock this morning. When the cardinal was here yesterday and found Mrs. Potter so much worse he gave orders to that effect. The nun implied that Mrs. Potter had long since become a Roman Catholic. It may be true, or it may not."

"Nice women, these nuns, if you cannot rely on their word," growled Mr. Potter.

The doctor seemed surprised. "There are many good women in the convents, but it was probably in the interests of her Church that she should give us to understand that your aunt had changed her faith. It offered some excuse for the incident of this morning."

"I don't see how there could be any excuse," blurted out Mr. Potter. "So it's right to lie in the interests of the Church, is it, and wrong at other times? It's a queer doctrine and one which a hard-headed Scotchman, like myself, finds hard to understand. Yea is yea, and nay is nay, with us. But go on, Doctor," he continued, brusquely, fully aware of the uselessness of prolonging a discussion when the points of view were so diametrically opposed.

"That's all. The priest of this parish came; that is evident, but for what reason I do not know."

"He did! How dared he, without my permission?" Mr. Potter began pacing the floor; he was

THE JESUIT

evidently mentally uneasy as well as decidedly displeased.

A faint smile crossed the doctor's face. A Scotchman and a priest! They were as far apart as the poles, and in a conflict the priest would come out a victor every time.

"I do not believe a word of this nonsense about my aunt. It is true that her mother was a Roman Catholic before her marriage, and my aunt was baptized in that faith. Later her mother changed her views and the whole family attended the Protestant Church."

"I was not aware of that fact," remarked Dr. Meredith, whose face was very grave, even severe. "Mrs. Potter has been a regular attendant at my church since she has lived in Rome."

The doctor smiled again. Naturally, he must further his patients' interests; but the fact of whether Mrs. Potter was Catholic or Protestant seemed to him of little consequence. He was a free-thinker—what difference could her religious views make?

"It is very possible that Mrs. Potter may have again adopted the Roman Catholic religion and yet remained outwardly a Protestant in order to serve some end," he suggested.

"It is not possible!" exclaimed Mr. Potter. "It's a matter of conscience, man! My aunt could not have done such a thing. Do you think she could?"

His manner of appeal to Dr. Meredith verged on

THE JESUIT

the pathetic. The sturdy Scotchman felt his weakness. His honest, bronzed face was pale with emotion.

"I have heard it stated that there are priests in the Church of England who are Jesuits and have a special dispensation in order that they may deceive others who trusted them. I could not believe it possible that there could be such duplicity veiled by religion. There have been holy men and women in the Roman Catholic Church; there were Faber and Newman and Manning. How could they have sanctioned such dealings? It cannot be true!"

The doctor turned to the window and appeared to be intensely interested in a disagreement between two market women, far below in the street, who had placed their carts side by side.

"Faber and Newman and Manning were sincere, good men," said Dr. Meredith. "And there are thousands of others among the clergy and the laity. There are, also, thousands of priests who long to leave the Church, because they feel that she has lost the simplicity and purity of religion, such as the fathers taught and exemplified in their lives. I have known your aunt for years, and it does not seem possible that she has hidden her real thoughts and feelings from me. If it is so, it cannot have been for any length of time—perhaps only since last summer. Do you consider Mrs. Potter to be in her right mind, Doctor?"

The physician turned sharply from the window.

THE JESUIT

The women who, five minutes before, had been ready to annihilate each other in their rage were now laughing as they pushed their carts, laden with bright-colored vegetables, down the street. They were amicably conversing as if nothing had happened.

"Mrs. Potter has lain in an unconscious condition, often for hours together; but when she comes to herself I consider her to be perfectly sane and rational. She was conscious when I left her."

"May we go in and talk with her?"

"Certainly."

"Come, also, if you please, Mr. Pierce," Dr. Meredith said. "I may want you as a witness, as well as Mr. Potter."

They entered the room and Dr. Meredith approached the bed. "Are you feeling better, my dear old friend?" he asked, bending over the patient.

"Dr. Meredith," whispered Mrs. Potter.

"Yes, it is I. I do not wish to fatigue you, Mrs. Potter, but, if you are able, I should be glad to have you answer a few questions. You understand what I say?"

"Yes."

Dr. Meredith sat down. "Will you kindly write down my questions, Mr. Pierce, with Mrs. Potter's answers?" Again he addressed the sick woman: "Dear friend, for many years we have known each other and have worked together for the cause of

THE JESUIT

Christ here in Rome. Have you ever doubted the saving grace of his atonement?"

"Never," she whispered.

"You believe that on Christ, and on Christ alone, depends your salvation?"

"I do."

"If God should call you home to his glorious presence this very day, would you die in the faith of your fathers, a Protestant of the Protestants?"

Up to this time, Mrs. Potter had kept her eyes closed, through weariness or weakness. Her nephew stood at the side of her bed, looking down anxiously at her. Mr. Pierce raised his eyes from his paper, and exchanged a glance with Dr. Meredith.

Mrs. Potter opened her eyes. There was a startled expression in them. Her voice was as strong as in health when she replied: "I die in the Protestant faith, trusting in Christ and in him alone for salvation."

Once more her eyes closed and she lay motionless.

"Please place your signature here, Mr. Potter, and then kindly call the doctor. And, Mr. Pierce, please sign below. We have this document in case of any trouble," he added in a low tone.

"Do you anticipate any trouble?" inquired Mr. Pierce in a whisper.

"One can never tell. Complications sometimes arise in cases similar to this."

The two ministers left the home together.

THE JESUIT

"Do you believe that the priest administered extreme unction this morning?"

"It is very probable."

"And in that case?" persisted Mr. Pierce.

"In that case they would no doubt regard Mrs. Potter as a Roman Catholic and would claim her body, to bury it in consecrated ground."

"Will that be likely to happen?"

Dr. Meredith faced Mr. Pierce and looked him straight in the eye. There was decision and sturdy righteousness in his expression. "It may be attempted, Mr. Pierce, but it will not succeed. I hold here the statement of Mrs. Potter herself that she dies in the Protestant faith. It is signed by you and Mr. Potter. I will protest to the last, if any effort is made, even by Cardinal Massimini, to claim her as a Roman Catholic."

There was unusual fire in the clergyman's face, and Mr. Pierce held out his hand to him.

"If you need any help, Dr. Meredith, call on me."

"Indeed I will, my dear brother," Dr. Brown replied, with a hearty grip of the extended hand.

"Dear Janet, come down and see the little girl whom you helped to escape from the convent," wrote Alda Pierce. "I am keeping her for awhile till we can tell what to do with her. She's as different as can be from the ordinary nun. But I'm glad she's not condemned to such a life. Her name is Romilda,

THE JESUIT

and she is very grateful to you, and so is her brother. Now, if she will only give her heart to Christ and become his follower! As might be expected, she is full of all kinds of superstitious fancies and curious notions. But what else can one expect from a girl who has spent her whole life with an ignorant, bigoted mother and with the nuns? We must show her what a beautiful thing our religion is. In the meantime she is playing with Alda, and it is difficult to tell which is the baby, she is so much of a child herself and so inexperienced in every way. I shall expect you at four."

"Different from a nun!" thought Janet, at the first sight of Romilda. "I should think so!"

Romilda was a round-faced, rosy-cheeked maiden of sixteen, with the eyes and hair of the women of Veneto, a vivacious expression, plump figure, and a voice like a bird. To imagine the hair with glints of gold hidden beneath a nun's coif, the blue eyes demure and lowered, the hands, now busy picking up baby's playthings, folded in prayer in the dark watches of the night, and the full round figure draped in black garments, was so difficult that Janet gave up trying.

"This is the lady who gave thy brother money so that he could come and get thee, Romilda," explained Mrs. Pierce.

To Janet's embarrassment, the Italian girl fell on her knees in front of her, clasped her hands in the plump brown ones and kissed them fervently, pour-

THE JESUIT

ing out a stream of liquid, musical language, as pretty as it was unintelligible.

"Do tell me what she says," pleaded Janet, "and beg her to get up. It is all right about the money. I so much prefer that she should not thank me—especially not in this energetic manner."

"Run away and play with Alda," said Mrs. Pierce, finding it difficult to retain a proper composure at sight of Janet's flushed face. When Romilda had left the room she laughed outright. "Poor girl! she was merely expressing her gratitude in her charming, warm-hearted way. I could not possibly translate it. Really, it is much more pitiful than ridiculous. She says you look like the picture of the Madonna in the little church at her home, and she probably could not give you a greater compliment, as she is ignorant of any other type of beauty. She is as happy as a child here. The stories she tells of her agonies when she thought she would be shut in for life are heartrending."

"I want so much to know how she escaped, and what plans you have for her future. I haven't dared tell Fay or mamma about it, for fear they would not like it. They have grown so intimate with Lady Eger, and they are so busy visiting the different churches. You know the celebration of the Festa of the Immaculate Virgin has begun, and they want to see all they can of it."

"Why don't you go, too, Miss Lapeer?" asked Mr. Pierce, who had entered quietly. "Please give

THE JESUIT

me a cup of tea, Alda, I must go out again at once."

"I really do not care to go. It sounds dreadful, perhaps, to express it so crudely, but the services seem to me to be theatrical displays, prepared for the public."

"And for the foreign public," added Mr. Pierce. "I am very sorry to have interrupted your conversation."

"I was only going to say, Alda, that I am worried about Fay. She does not look well; she is pale and growing thin, and is not a bit like her gay old self. Something is troubling her; I am sure of it. She is very much under Lady Eger's influence, and I fear that this extends to religious matters as well. And there is the marquis—"

"What about him?" interrupted Mrs. Pierce.

Before Janet could answer, Dr. Meredith's deep voice said at the door: "May I have a cup of tea, too, Mrs. Pierce?"

"By all means. Sit down in this easy chair, Dr. Meredith, you look so tired. My friend, Miss Lapeer, Dr. Meredith."

Mr. Pierce moved a chair forward and the good clergyman dropped into it as though he were very weary.

"It's all arranged," he remarked in a low tone to Mr. Pierce. "The funeral will be on Thursday, at four, at the Protestant cemetery."

"Thus far, no interference?"

THE JESUIT

"Not since this morning. You were acquainted with Mrs. Potter, were you not, Miss Lapeer? I heard her speak of you."

"Yes. I was grieved to hear the sad news of her death."

"It occurred at five o'clock yesterday morning. The nun who acted as nurse insisted that she died a Roman Catholic."

"A Catholic!" exclaimed Janet.

"I'll explain afterward," said Mrs. Pierce.

"But I assured her that she did not. Mr. Pierce and I went to the English cemetery and saw the director, who promised to send men and have the body removed at three o'clock this morning. The nuns remained in the room and placed lighted candles around Mrs. Potter's bed and a crucifix in her hands, which her nephew promptly removed, notwithstanding their protests. They had no idea that funeral arrangements would be made so quickly. As you know, Mr. Pierce, Mr. Potter and I guarded the great door of the house until the director and his men appeared. There was no disturbance."

"How very strange," murmured Janet. "I thought she was a Protestant."

"She was."

"And yet—"

"And yet, my dear young lady, Rome is Rome, and can never be anything else but a city of mystery—a veiled city, it has been called."

THE JESUIT

"But *was* she a Catholic?" persisted Janet.

"Certainly not when she died, as Mr. Pierce can attest. And the physician said that her mind was perfectly clear. I received a note from Cardinal Massimini this morning. He criticises me sharply for my interference in a case of a daughter of the 'true Church,' and says that although Mrs. Potter may be buried in unconsecrated ground, she died in the Roman Catholic faith."

"It's a singular case," said Mr. Pierce. "I am ready whenever you are, Doctor."

"Let us go then; Mr. Potter will be waiting."

"Now, tell me what he meant," demanded Janet.

Mrs. Pierce told her of the early morning visit, of the priest and the nuns, and their duplicity. Janet's face grew paler and paler. At last, a low cry burst from her lips.

"What is it, dear? Are you ill?"

"No, Alda, but I'm frightened, frightened for Fay. I am sure that something dreadful is going to happen, Alda. I am sure of it! What it will be, I do not know. I know that she likes the marquis, and as little as I want her to marry him, I should prefer to have her his wife than to have her yield to the persuasions of Padre Veroni and Lady Eger. I do not know what they are urging her to do, but some conflict is taking place in her mind. She tells me nothing, nor does she confide in mamma."

THE JESUIT

"Is she engaged to the marquis?"

"I do not think so. I feel as if we were entering dark shadows, Alda."

"You are nervous, dear. There may be shadows ahead of us, but the Light is with us, and he that walketh in the Light need fear no darkness. Have you forgotten about Romilda, Janet? The history of her escape is really marvelous," said Mrs. Pierce, anxious to divert Janet from her disturbing thoughts and consequent depression.

"I had forgotten."

"Her brother waited several days in the little town before he could see her. The old servant was faithful to her trust, and managed to carry the letters back and forth. The convent is beautifully situated on the top of a high hill. When the pupils are taken for a walk they come down the hill in pairs, accompanied by two lay sisters, one in front, and one behind. Romilda's brother nearly despaired of freeing her when he saw how closely the girls were watched and guarded. But on the fourth day fortune favored him. The girls came out later than usual, and before they were ready to return to the convent it grew quite dark. At one point in the road leading up the hill, there is a short tunnel dug through the rock. As they passed through it a carriage drove by, and under cover of the noise and obscurity Romilda slipped away and ran swiftly back to the place where her brother and the maid had agreed to wait each day. In a very short time

THE JESUIT

they reached the station, where, fortunately, they were able to take a train before the nuns had time to warn the Mother Superior and a search could be begun. He brought her to Pisa, and thence they came on to Rome, arriving this morning."

"What are you going to do with her, Alda?"

"Make a good woman of her, if God wills. My husband will communicate with her mother, so that she may be assured of her safety. I do not think she will insist upon claiming her. I believe that the law will not allow her mother to force her into the convent against her wish."

Janet arose.

"Let me help her," she said, earnestly; "I have plenty of money and nobody on whom to spend it. I shall be glad to do something for her. But please do not let her express her deep sense of obligation again in that energetic way. It is embarrassing."

Mrs. Pierce laughed, relieved to see that Janet's expression was less tense and anxious.

"It is good of you, dear, but it will be better for her to earn her own living. I suppose you have no need of a little maid," she suggested, tentatively. "It would give you an opportunity to help Romilda and form her character."

"A maid! My dear girl, I am afraid there would be little enough for her to do. And yet—with three women, we might keep her occupied. I will think of it and speak to mamma. I should not dare to tell

THE JESUIT

her Romilda's history, for there is Padre Veroni to be thought of."

"And if he heard of it, no doubt poor Romilda would find herself back in the convent very quickly."

Janet kissed Mrs. Pierce warmly and hurried away, for it was now quite dark. The problems of life and her own special group of problems puzzled her. They haunted her in the night, so that she could not sleep and became so restless that she left her bed and stood at the window, looking out on the towers and domes of Rome, glorified and etherialized in the soft moonlight. For centuries Rome had been seething with intrigue and mystery. Even today, life was far different from that in other cities; it was more intangible, more elusive, more bewildering. And Fay—what of Fay? Dear sister! Once she had spoken to her mother of her anxiety, only to be answered in a brusque manner totally different from Mrs. Lapeer's customary gentleness. Fay was all right, she said, and if Janet took half the interest that Fay did in the wonderful churches and relics, she would be wiser than she was now! After that rebuff Janet had kept her troubles hidden in her own soul.

There was only one person who seemed to divine them, and that was hearty, bluff Sir John. They stood together, on the following Thursday, at the grave of Mrs. Potter, after the last solemn words had been spoken and the last prayer uttered. Janet laid a cluster of white roses on the fresh, moist earth.

THE JESUIT

The cemetery was very quiet, very beautiful. In the tall, dark cypress trees, birds were singing as blithely as if there were no sorrow or weeping in the world. Flowers were blooming everywhere, even though it was December, and on the old Aurelian Wall ivy hung in long, graceful festoons. Over the wall rose the ancient Pyramid of Cestius, past which Saint Paul probably walked as he was led forth to execution. The sun was setting, and the cross on the summit of Mount Testaccio spread its arms against the crimson glow.

"You have heard that strange story about Mrs. Potter's conversion to Roman Catholicism, Sir John?" Janet asked.

"Yes, Dr. Meredith told me."

Sir John watched her with a peculiar expression in which there was some sadness and a touch of anxiety.

"Do you believe it?" she continued.

"Rome is a strange place," he replied, "and strange things happen here. There is a witchery about her which turns men's brains. She has been appropriately pictured as a lovely woman sitting on a throne in the midst of the Seven Hills, fascinating the world and drawing men to worship before her. About Mrs. Potter, Miss Lapeer, I do not know whether I believe it or not. It may be true. Mrs. Potter had lived so long in Italy and was very intimate with Cardinal Massimini's sister; spent months with her, in fact, every year."

THE JESUIT

"Yet she died in the Protestant faith."

"That might easily be. When she was face to face with death and eternity she may have returned to the religion of former days. Would that it might be so with Hortense!" he added softly.

Janet was startled to see that his eyes were full of tears. There, by Mrs. Potter's grave, she stretched out her hand to him. Seemingly without design he led her away, and hand in hand they passed on to the gate of the cemetery. Sir John was so deep in thought that he did not notice what he was doing until Janet gently moved away.

"I beg pardon," he murmured, flushing deeply.

They emerged from the gate, acknowledging the pleasant words of farewell from the woman who opened it and who smiled as she pocketed the "soldi" given her by Sir John.

The cross on Mount Testaccio was bare and black now that the crimson glow had faded from the sky. The children playing in the street begged for pennies as Janet and Sir John went by. The bells of the tram on its way to the Church of Saint Paul's without the walls, tinkled gaily.

"Mrs. Potter's will was read this morning," Sir John said at last, when the silence began to grow painful. "Had you heard about it?"

"No."

He waited a moment. Then he spoke: "She left some legacies to her family. Two thirds of her for-

THE JESUIT

tune she left to Cardinal Massimini, 'to be used as he thought best.' ”

“ Then it *was* true! ” exclaimed Janet, shocked at this news.

“ God only knows, Miss Lapeer. He alone understands the intricate workings of a human mind,” he replied.



CHAPTER XV

"PADRE VERONI, this is indeed an honor!"

The Marquis di Cassini came forward with outstretched hand to meet the priest on a morning early in December.

The air was crisp and invigorating. It came from the north, where, on the mountains defining the horizon, the first snows of the season lay, white summits merging into the white clouds above them.

"I beg you to sit down, Reverenza. It was so cool this morning that I thought a wood fire would be acceptable."

"Fortunate man!" said Padre Veroni, seating himself in an easy chair. "No, I will not go too near the fire, thank you. It is very pleasant, but I prefer to look at it from a distance. We poor priests, who cannot afford such luxuries, would better not become accustomed to them."

The priest cast a comprehensive glance around the marquis's library.

"This was your father's study?"

"Yes, Reverenza."

"I always considered it a handsome room, but you have improved it by introducing some modern conveniences. Your father would have scorned the mere idea of such a fire. How well I remember

THE JESUIT

him! He was a taller man than you, Guido, and made of sterner stuff."

Even as he spoke the priest wondered whether his own words were true. Had the old marquis been firmer or more positive in his opinions than his son? From behind partially closed lids he examined the face before him; noted the firm mouth, the square jaw, the broad expanse of forehead, beneath which shone frank, fearless eyes. He began to doubt the success of his mission on that cold December morning. But Padre Veroni was not a man to allow his ammunition to lie idle. He fired his first shot.

"Your father would never have betrayed the Church into which he was born," he said, quietly.

The marquis gave a nervous start, bit his lips, and waited for the next remark.

"The bill concerning Saint Joseph's College at V—— will come before the house soon. Which way do you intend to vote?"

No answer. The priest's face grew hard and cold. His lips contracted, as if with a spasm of pain. Padre Veroni was not accustomed to opposition, and he intended to win. There was not a quiver of excitement in his tone as he spoke.

"I am particularly interested in this question, Guido. V—— is a strategic point. I want you to throw your influence on our side. The bill must pass and you must help."

"The government maintains schools at V——" responded the marquis, doggedly.

THE JESUIT

He had taken a seat where his back was toward the window. The light fell on the priest's face, upon the long, straight nose, thin lips and pointed chin; upon the skin with tint of ivory, such as a man has who spends his life within doors in company with dusty tomes, dating back to past centuries. His slender hands were partially hidden in the folds of his black gown.

"Yes, the government has its schools, but we want ours. What do the children learn in those schools? Disloyalty to the Church, into whose loving care they were committed when the priest baptized them. They learn to bow before the king of Italy and lift their hats when the tricolored flag is carried by. They learn to hate religion—"

"As it is exemplified by the priests," interrupted the marquis, coldly, as his black eyes glowed with sudden wrath.

Padre Veroni did not move a muscle of his face. It remained as impassive as a piece of marble.

"To hate religion," he continued, "and mock at our holy symbols. They become atheists, or what I may call worse—heretics. These are the reasons why we must have our own schools, and you must help us, Guido."

"I must!"

"Yes."

"And if I prefer to retain my manhood, my right to think with the mind which I possess—the gift of God—I am no atheist, Padre Veroni. And if I

THE JESUIT

should dare defy the authority of the Church, what then?"

The marquis was not a very tall man, but as he arose he was stately in his dignity.

The priest did not change his position except to touch the fingertips of his right hand to those of his left. "Then the Church will deal with the son who defies her authority as she sees fit, Guido," he said, suddenly rising and placing his arm around the young man's shoulders. "Guido," he continued, "I held thee in my arms when thou wast a child. I loved thy father as well as if he had been my own brother. Thy mother is a faithful daughter of the Church. Floria will soon—"

The marquis threw off the priest's arm impatiently and muttered a curse. "I cannot bear it! Do not speak of Floria! If you must know the truth, it is that which has driven me away from the Church. What right has a mother to make a vow which will ruin the life of her child, which condemns her to absolute slavery in the loveliest years of her youth? What sort of a Church is it that accepts such a sacrifice, though the victim as the so-called bride of Christ brings a princely dowry? If Floria felt it her duty to become a nun—"

Padre Veroni's deep-set eyes glistened. "You would consider that a different case, more justifiable?" he broke in.

"By all means. Then she would immure herself voluntarily."

THE JESUIT

Entirely unconscious of the fact that he had uttered words which would come back to him at some future day of anguish, the marquis wondered at the sudden vivacity of the priest's manner.

"So you refuse to oblige me in this matter, Guido?"

"I am sorry to refuse, Reverenza, indeed I am. For old acquaintance sake, and for love of my mother, I would gladly do as you desire, but my own conscience prevents me. You have your reasons for wanting this bill to pass. We, on our part, are influenced by reasons which we consider fully as strong."

"Consciences are peculiar things, aren't they, Guido? Sometimes they seem to point us in the direction which we wish to take. And yours is only the conscience of an inexperienced boy."

Guido winced and Padre Veroni smiled. There was something repulsive in that smile, though he appeared to have entirely regained his good humor.

"Your conscience may lead you in the opposite direction by the time the bill is presented to the House."

"I don't think so."

"Well, I hope so, anyway, for it is a serious matter to oppose the Church."

Guido shrugged his shoulders.

"I understand that you desire to marry the American girl at the Pension Speranza," was Padre Veroni's startling and unexpected remark.

THE JESUIT

The marquis drew himself up proudly. "I really do not see—" he began, when the priest interrupted him.

"You do not see how I know of it, or what affair it is of mine."

"Precisely."

"My dear boy, it is very much my affair; more than you know. Are you betrothed to the young lady?"

"I hope to be, soon."

"And in case of your marriage to Miss Fay Lapeer, you would again become a loyal son of the Church, would devote yourself to our interests, and forget these foolish, boyish fancies?"

There was a painful pause.

"I really do not see—" began the marquis once more.

"Answer me!" thundered the priest.

"I could make no promises of that sort," replied Guido di Cassini, "and I do not think it is necessary for me to ask your permission, Padre Veroni. Miss Lapeer is a Protestant, and if I am so fortunate as to win her for my wife, she will doubtless desire to be married according to that rite. It will make no difference to me. The civil marriage is the legal one, anyway."

Padre Veroni had himself well under control, or he would have burst out into passionate reproaches at these words.

"And your mother?" he inquired.

THE JESUIT

"My mother loves me and will agree to anything that I wish. Besides, I am my own master. I am thirty years old."

"I understand that Miss Fay has a large fortune."

"I do not know and have never tried to find out. Whatever she has, if she becomes my wife—and I pray God she will!—will be entirely in her own control. I have enough for both, and am no fortune-hunter."

The priest put his hands on the doorknob.

"Let us part in peace, Guido, my boy. Once more I ask you, solemnly, will you yield to me and vote in favor of this bill? It seems a small thing, but it may influence your life more than you now imagine. I plead with you, Guido. Do not throw away your opportunity. For the sake of your mother and for the happiness of the woman you love, do your duty toward the Church. It may mean more to you than you know."

"I cannot feel it right to go against my own convictions, Reverenza. The government cannot turn over the entire education of children in that district to the Church. What you say of the lack of loyalty to the Church which is taught in the public schools is true in the reverse in the parochial schools. Do you teach the children to honor the king and to fight for their country? No, Padre Veroni, I cannot do as you wish."

"Very well. Good morning."

THE JESUIT

The priest strode through the long corridors of the palace, and with a surly "Grazie" accepted his hat from the servant. Ten minutes later he was talking animatedly with Cardinal Perotti.

The marquis sat a long time in front of the fire thinking. He was an Italian, and was well aware that he could from henceforth expect bitter opposition from Padre Veroni, who was very powerful. "Yet, he can do nothing which can seriously injure me or my family," thought Guido, considering all side of the question. "He cannot alienate from me my family or my property. I am glad that Fay is not a Roman Catholic. Who knows? Perhaps I may turn evangelical! She may teach me the way."

The great gun on Monte Mario boomed out the hour of twelve. Guido sprang to his feet.

"I promised mother to go to the convent for Floria," he said.

Hastening downstairs, he entered a closed carriage which was waiting, and was driven rapidly to the large building on the outskirts of the city. Padre Veroni, his veiled threats, his reference to the power of the Church, were all forgotten, as, with his sister by his side, he returned to his home. It was the first visit she had made to her family in five years, and it would be the last. At Easter she was to begin her novitiate, and when she took the veil it would mean farewell forever to the world. The rules of the order were very strict; not even the Marchesa di Cassini, her own mother, would be per-

THE JESUIT

mitted to see Floria's face. She might come, by permission of the Mother Superior, and at stated times, to talk with her daughter through a grating and in the presence of another nun. On this occasion of the Festa of the Immaculate Virgin, Floria had been allowed to return to her home for one month, to pass the Christmas holidays. Before Epiphany she must return to the convent, rarely, if ever, to leave it again, and then only in a closed carriage, with shuttered windows and drawn curtains.

The marquis often wondered at his own weakness in this affair. Why had he not long ago forbidden this burial in a convent of the sister whom he so dearly loved? Probably his hesitancy was due to a feeling of respect toward his mother and a reluctance to interfere in religious questions. He preferred to leave them to the women and the priests.

Fay Lapeer had grown very friendly with Gemma, the second sister of Marquis di Cassini. it was for her début that the Marchesa was to give a grand ball soon in the splendid rooms of the palace. Fay had already ordered a new gown in fleecy white chiffon, embroidered in silver, from one of the best dressmakers in Rome. The embroidery was to be done by the poor women who worked for the Woman's Exchange and a month's work was required to accomplish it.

Gemma and Fay were eagerly discussing this gown and the coming festivity on the morning after Floria's arrival. As she was now quite familiar

THE JESUIT

with the corridors and salons of the palace, Fay no longer felt the desire to stop and examine the splendid paintings and valuable tapestries. Today, she and Gemma walked through a long, narrow hall and turned off to a wing of the great building, where the daughters had their bedrooms and a private sitting room. In the various visits which Fay had made here she had never encountered the marquis. In fact, so little time did he spend with the women of his household that he was not aware that she had been under his roof. These Roman palaces are immense buildings. The entire ground floor is given up to the domestics, the housekeeper's and steward's apartments, the offices, servants' dining rooms, kitchen, laundry, and in some cases, the stables and carriages find accommodations here. The marquis had a garage for his two fine automobiles and his chauffeur slept in a room nearby. Two large Saint Bernard dogs were comfortably housed in the court. Behind the house was a spacious garden, with vari-colored flower-beds and graceful shade-trees, with arbors and fountains and statues. High walls surrounded this garden of beauty, and little noise penetrated here, although the palace stood in the center of busy Rome.

The young ladies of the family, and even the marchesa herself, never left home unaccompanied. Most of their time was spent in this beautiful garden, where they embroidered or read the few books which were considered by their father-confessor

THE JESUIT

suitable for them. They were so utterly shocked when Fay came alone to call upon them that she finally decided to yield to their Roman prejudices and brought with her Romilda, who was now Janet's little maid. She waited downstairs, meekly sitting on a chair in the court, with her hands resting demurely in her lap, while her eyes danced with merriment at the pranks of a couple of mischievous stable boys.

The apartment of the marquis was in the opposite wing. It consisted of a bedroom, reception salon, and library. Very frequently many days passed in which he saw his mother only at the very formal dinner. The day after Floria came, Guido had appeared most unexpectedly at luncheon, and had gone for a drive with the ladies on the Pincio and through the winding roads of the Villa Borghese. Indeed, his heart was sore with pity for his little sister, and he would gladly have done anything to cause her pleasure.

Gemma opened a door, but closed it hastily, allowing time, however, for Fay to catch a glimpse of an altar, with a stained glass window above it. Noting her curious glance, Gemma said: "It is our private chapel. Would you like to see it?"

"Very much."

In the semidarkness, little was distinguishable at first. It was a small room, and the window, through which the dim light penetrated, was made of rare old glass, richly tinted. Facing it were sev-

THE JESUIT

eral kneeling benches, and at one of them knelt a young girl, dressed in sober gray. In her hands she turned a rosary. Her head was bowed in prayer. The obscurity and the stillness, the motionless, kneeling figure, the rose light falling on the face of the mother in a fine copy of the Sistine Madonna affected Fay powerfully. The beauty appealed to her æsthetic sense, which was very strongly developed. She had found it hard to be good, to shut out the world and devote herself to God alone. Surely, it would be easy, here in this quiet chapel! She felt faint and ill, overcome by a new and peculiar emotion. Peace must be found in such a place as this! Opening the door, she stepped out into the sun-lighted hall. It was a transition which jarred upon Fay's highly-strung sensibilities.

"That was my sister Floria," explained Gemma. "She will spend a month with us before entering the convent forever. Twice a day she has to pray for a long time in the chapel. What a task it must be! I am thankful that mamma did not make a vow that I should have a vocation. I should not have been so patient as Floria is!"

"How did it happen?"

"Haven't you ever heard? I thought Lady Eger told you when she took you to the convent. When Floria was a tiny baby, mamma was very ill, and everybody thought she was going to die. So she vowed to the Madonna that if she would spare her

THE JESUIT

life Floria should be a nun and spend her time praying for the rest of us poor, worldly creatures. You see, Floria is next to the youngest of us four girls, and I suppose mamma thought it would be a good and easy way to dispose of one of us. It is a difficult matter to find suitable husbands for four daughters, even though they do have large dowries. There's my dress. How do you like it?"

Fay absently fingered the costly lace and silk, but her mind was busy with her thoughts. "How beautiful!" she said at last.

Gemma's face brightened. She had been annoyed by Fay's coldness.

"I'm so glad you like it," she replied.

"Forgive me, Gemma." Fay clasped the small brown hand in her own. "The dress is very lovely, and you will be charming in it; but when I said 'how beautiful!' I was not referring to it."

"To what, then?"

"To Floria and the sacrifice she made for her mother. She must love her very much," added romantic Fay.

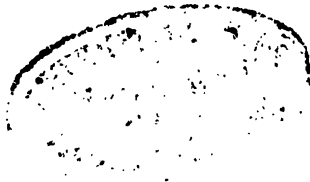
Gemma was of a practical turn of mind. She responded, dryly, "She has scarcely seen enough of mamma to know whether she loves her or not. And it would not have mattered much. She could not help herself if the priest and mamma told her she must be a nun. I think she hates the life," Gemma continued, as calmly as if she were speaking of a matter in which she had not the slightest per-

THE JESUIT

sonal interest. "Fay, what flowers shall I wear—roses, or lilies of the valley?"

"I am sure I don't know," Fay answered, lost in her dreams.

Gemma, deeply hurt at this indifference in an affair of so great importance, followed her through the hall and parted from her without the customary show of affection.



CHAPTER XVI

SOMEONE has said that every event in this world takes its coloring from the point of view. It would have been interesting to study the impression made on the minds of the thousands of men and women who were assembled in the Church of Saint Peter by the function which took place on December 6, 1905. Pius X, a simple-hearted peasant Pope, was to crown the pictured head of the Virgin Mary with a circlet composed of diamonds and other sparkling precious stones, which had cost thirty thousand dollars. Cardinals, bishops, and priests had come to Rome for this fiftieth anniversary of Pius IXth's promulgation of the doctrine of Mary's immaculate conception. Even now, in the early hours of a cold winter day, the procession was entering the building, a procession so gorgeous, so stately, that rarely has the Roman Catholic Church produced its equal.

The Pope, borne upon the chair of state, was robed in all the rich and costly vestments which were his by pontifical right. The cardinals, in purple garments, passed slowly by. It was a scene long to be remembered, if not reverently, at least as a grand theatrical display and shimmer of silk and gold embroidery, brightened by the jewel colors which filtered through century-old windows of rare glass. Some of the thousands of spectators bowed rever-

THE JESUIT

ently, as the Pope held out his hand in apostolic and pontifical benediction; others looked on with curiosity, some with amusement, as if they were gratified and diverted by the unusual display.

The Lapeers were all there, occupying specially fine places, thanks to Cardinal Perotti's wise forethought and his respect for the millions which the three ladies represented. With them was Lady Eger, who was looking pale and thin.

Far back in the procession, among the humbler clergy, was Don Paolo, who had taken his place unwillingly, and with a feeling of sadness which he was unable to overcome. What a farce it appeared to him, this show of state, the wealth of vestments, this mockery of religion! He had begun to drink deeply at the pure fountain of spiritual truth as taught by Christ himself. The function of today, the offering to the Virgin of an almost pagan idolatry, an idolatry which could only be unpleasing to the humble mother of our Lord, was distasteful to Don Paolo, who endured it for two reasons: one was a feeling of gratitude and respect to Padre Veroni; the other, because of his affection for an old woman who knelt yonder by the pillar, her black-veiled head bowed over her rosary which she turned in hard, knotted hands, worn by heavy work in the fields far from Rome. It was Aunt Rosina, her long-cherished desire fulfilled by this pilgrimage to what she considered the Holy City. He could not disappoint her; once more, and once only, and then, farewell to

THE JESUIT

all these associations and a beginning of a new and better life, devoted to God's service, if it please him. Don Paolo knelt also, and there, deaf to all that was passing around him, regardless of the music, the prayers, the intoning, he consecrated himself to God's work, ready to accept hardships, disgrace in the sight of those who had been his friends, and ostracism from all Roman Catholics. The path would be stony and hard, but there was One who had "trod the winepress alone," whose hands and feet had been pierced with nails, who would go with him, close by his side. He would not be alone. A great peace filled Don Paolo's soul, and when Janet saw his face, as the procession filed slowly by on its return to the Vatican, she wondered at the singular light which illuminated and ennobled it.

The Lapeer party had closely observed the entire function, but with totally different feelings. Mrs. Lapeer was intensely interested in the vestments and the different robes of cardinals, bishops, and priests. Janet was puzzling out for herself the whole question of whys and wherefores, analyzing it more or less critically, until the personal element entered into it, and she forgot criticism in extreme anxiety. Lady Eger was on her knees, as the Pope was carried by, and, to Janet's horror, Fay, her sister Fay, with an abrupt movement, sank down reverently, bowed her fair head beneath the benediction of the Pope, and crossed herself as fervently as if she had been a Roman Catholic all her life.

THE JESUIT

Mrs. Gray shot a glance at Mrs. Lapeer, who appeared to be calm and unmoved by this strange occurrence.

"You would have supposed that she was accustomed to seeing Fay act that way," Mrs. Gray said, excitedly, to her husband in the privacy of their own room at the pension, an hour later.

Mr. Gray smoked, calmly.

"No doubt she is very much pleased," he responded, at last.

"Pleased! What do you mean, Henry? Pleased that her daughter should turn Catholic!"

"Hasn't she been hobnobbing with priests for some time? Doesn't she want Fay to marry the marquis who comes here so often? My dear Mary," Mr. Gray laid down his cigar and stood up in front of his wife, "these priests play their game mighty well. They don't spend any time over us honest fellows who keep our wits about us; we are too hard to deal with. They take hold of the widows and the fatherless—always providing they have plenty of money—and gently beguile them by means of theatrical exhibitions and good music, and make them believe that they are becoming spiritual, religious! Bah! it is unbearable."

"But, Henry, Grace Lapeer is not a fool. She attends to all her own business affairs as well as any man."

"Not by any means a fool, my dear. But they knew just where her tender spot was—her ambition

THE JESUIT

for her children. They've caught Fay, poor girl! But they'll never get Janet!"

"Her face was as pale as a sheet."

"I'm sorry for Janet, and I'm sorry for them all, Mary, for I feel that there are troubles ahead of them. If we could help—"

"I don't see how we can," sighed Mrs. Gray. "It's that wily Lady Eger and that Italian priest—"

"That are weaving the web. That's true enough, but behind them, Mary, is a tremendous power, a hierarchy so great, so ambitious, that it is using every means to gain its own ends. America and England will have to watch out, or they'll get caught in the web, too. It's hard for us Anglo-Saxon Protestants to get on to their methods, but, by Jove! if we don't do it soon, their methods will get on to us!"

Mr. Gray took up his cigar, lighted it again, and became absorbed in gloomy contemplation.

"Would it do any good for me to talk to Grace?" suggested Mrs. Gray at last.

"Not the slightest. Her head is full of nonsense. I tell you, Mary, I'm not a very religious man, not so much as I ought to be, but I'm convinced of one thing. You good women must get down on your knees, and *pray*, pray harder than you ever have in your lives that God will take a hand in this matter."

CHAPTER XVII

THE announcement of the betrothal of Marquis di Cassini to a beautiful and wealthy American lady caused a sensation in Rome. Mrs. Lapeer and her daughters were no longer obscure and unknown tourists; they became the center of interest, for the moment, in both branches of society: to the "Blacks"—or those families whose sympathies were strongly in favor of the papal party—because of the bigotry of the marchioness, and also to those moving in political, liberal circles, to which the marquis belonged.

Invitations were showered upon the Lapeers. Carriages, whose doors were ornamented with coronets or an elaborate coat-of-arms, were seen daily in front of the pension. Congratulations, bouquets of exquisite orchids or choice blossoms, and even presents of costly jewels, were offered to Fay, who, in the unusual excitement, became more lovely and charming each day. It was a new experience in the midst of novel surroundings, and Mrs. Lapeer's head was almost turned by the adulation which was given them. She hired an electric automobile, with properly liveried chauffeur and footman, and, in company with her daughters, paid visits, drove in the parks, or encircled the Pincian Hill, joining the line of waiting vehicles to listen to

THE JESUIT

the music of the band, and receive compliments from the gentlemen who came to speak to the ladies.

Father Veroni had been among the first to present his good wishes to the future marchioness. Fay had never thought him so pleasant or winning as when he wished her every blessing.

"We shall soon welcome you to the Mother Church, my dear young lady," he said, grasping her hand, warmly. "When will you make your formal declaration before the world?"

"When you desire it, Father Veroni," Fay replied.

"You are absolutely certain of the wisdom of this step?" he added, in apparent hesitation. "It will make a difference in your life. It means and requires a certain degree of separation from your family and early associations; it may include the sacrifice of your will to the decrees of the Church."

"I am ready for all this," Fay replied, with unusual firmness, for the priest's eye held hers. With that penetrating gaze fixed upon them, many men and women had been willing, even eager, to resign all that was dear to them, for the sake of the Church which he represented.

There was a slight expression of triumph in those eyes, as Father Veroni said: "And your mother?"

"My mother will not oppose my wishes. I have hopes that she, too, may some day adopt the true faith."

"Have you told your sister?"

THE JESUIT

The question of Janet's conversion was one which Padre Veroni had never discussed, even with himself. He had an instinctive feeling that it was not possible.

For the first time, Fay's expression was saddened.

"No," she said, softly. "I am afraid."

"Fear not," replied the priest. "It is your fixed purpose and desire to become a Roman Catholic, is it not?"

"I have been one for some time already in my heart."

"Then have no fear. Go boldly to your sister and tell her all. She is a noble woman, and, though she may differ with you in her religious views, she will be too broad-minded to condemn you." How well this priest understood Janet's character! "You may be the means of saving her soul."

Fay clasped her hands together, nervously.

"O, if it might be so! I would make any sacrifice, do anything, if Janet could be brought to believe in the truth faith—our faith!"

Father Veroni studied the face before him. It was full of beauty and sweetness, and he saw in it exactly what he wanted to find, exactly what suited his purposes, the characteristics of an enthusiast, a fanatic. Once aroused in her affections, Fay Lapeer would go to the extreme limit of self-sacrifice. She was a girl of one idea. At present the Roman Catholic Church exercised its power over her and she was absorbed in the new faith.

THE JESUIT

"That is the spirit which animated the saints and martyrs," said Father Veroni, softly, watching the effect of his words. The girl's soul was like an exquisite instrument, on which he must play gently, with skilled touch. "They were ready to *die* for their religion. May I say one thing more? The Marquis di Cassini, though born of a pious mother, shows a decided leaning toward liberal views. It has saddened me greatly and I am building strong hopes on your influence over him. Who knows? You may be the means of drawing him back, of holding him to the Church. In these days, when her enemies are so powerful, she has need of such men as the marquis. Perhaps it was for this purpose that you came to Rome, that you met the marquis, and became betrothed to him."

Fay was now completely carried away with enthusiasm. Her eyes shone with unusual brilliancy and the priest felt a thrill of self-reproach.

"It is worth a sacrifice, is it not?" he asked.

"Yes," she replied, simply, and he knew that the seed so carefully planted had fallen on good ground and would bear fruit.

Father Veroni left her and went out into the street, walking slowly toward his home.

"How the girl loves that man!" he thought, "and it is through this love that we must work. If the marquis will yield to her influence, all will be well. If not, he must bear the consequences of his stubbornness and folly. Lady Eger will help—but

THE JESUIT

sometimes I have doubts of Lady Eger. As her physical strength diminishes, her mind reverts to her early life, to her husband and child; her affection for the Church is lessened by these earthly ties. I must go more frequently to see her. It has been my observation that, in such cases, the personal element is very powerful, the influence of mind upon mind is important."

There was a peculiar smile on Father Veroni's lips which implied certain agreeable recollections. This smile changed suddenly to a frown. Was that Don Paolo crossing the street and entering the Protestant building, on which the white marble cross, surmounting the church door, glistened in the bright sunshine? It certainly was the young priest! He had courage to do this bold act in broad daylight.

"Going to Pierce!" muttered Padre Veroni. "I fear that he is lost to us. He has a brilliant mind and unusual ability, but these are combined with too great a desire to speculate on religious questions and be independent. What a fool the boy is! He could be a bishop, or a cardinal, by exercising a reasonable amount of prudence and keeping his opinions to himself. But no; he must throw away a successful future for an idea, a myth."

Occupied with these thoughts, Father Veroni turned his steps toward the Vatican, to the apartment of Cardinal Perotti. The result of his conversation with this prelate was the appearance at

THE JESUIT

Don Paolo's door, the next day, of a spruce young man who sent in a neatly engraved card bearing the name: "Enrico Gardi, Secretary to His Eminence Cardinal Perotti."

Don Paolo read the card twice before he spoke to the servant who brought it to him.

"Ask the gentleman to come in," he said.

He glanced around the room with a smile which denoted some amusement. The cardinal's secretary would find food for surprise in his library. There were no longer any signs of priestly life in it. The ivory and ebony crucifix, a gift from Father Veroni, had been removed from its place. There were no pictures of the madonna, no photographs of well-known shrines. With the exception of one or two family portraits the walls were bare of ornament. On the table lay a Bible, with several other Protestant books by noted authors. The only touch of color came from a beautiful rose in a plain glass vase, standing where Don Paolo could enjoy its loveliness and inhale its fragrance.

"You desired to see me?" he inquired, courteously, when the cardinal's secretary entered.

"Yes, Reverenza. I bring a letter from his eminence, Cardinal Perotti."

"Please be seated, sir."

Signor Gardi looked around him with interest. His eyes saw even the smallest details. Last of all, they rested on the priest. The secretary knew a good deal about Don Paolo; his ears were ever open

THE JESUIT

to catch the lightest word. He knew that the priest was called the "Silver-tongued," and that common report said that Father Veroni loved him better than he did anyone else in the whole world. The wily secretary surmised that there was a romance somewhere, far back in the life of this cold, reserved Jesuit. He knew, also, that Don Paolo was suspected of a tendency toward heresy, and he shared Father Veroni's opinion that he was a fool.

"The carriage is waiting?" asked Don Paolo, at last.

"His eminence's carriage is at the door, Reverenza."

"Then let us go at once."

His voice was calm and his step firm. Not even the observant secretary suspected that his heart fluttered like a woman's, and his prayer arose to God for strength in the ordeal which he knew awaited him. It was no light matter for a priest to be called before a great cardinal, high in favor at the Vatican. In a city where everyone is watched, where every gesture, every word is supposed to have a special signification, Don Paolo knew that he could not go to the Protestant building without being observed. He was an honorable, conscientious man. He had entered the door openly and without fear, being ready to suffer the extreme consequences of his actions.

The secretary noticed with the satisfaction of one who regards this life as a stage, on which men were

THE JESUIT

playing for evil or good for his amusement, that the priest's cheeks were very pale when he was shown into the immense library, where the cardinal and Father Veroni were sitting. The room was in semi-darkness. Its windows were shaded by the high walls of surrounding sections of the Vatican Palace. It was with sincere regret that the secretary reluctantly closed the door, metaphorically dropping the curtain of a play which promised to be interesting, if not exciting.

"God help me!" murmured Paolo Gregori, going slowly forward to the two men.

There was stillness in the spacious, vaulted room. Don Paolo's footsteps were stifled in a thick Persian carpet. Neither of those who were awaiting his coming made any welcoming movement except to offer him their white hands, which he kissed, according to his lifelong habit when greeting a superior. He stood in front of them like a culprit.

"Your Eminence wished to see me?" he inquired, breaking the oppressive silence. The sound of his own voice gave him courage. Into his mind came those lines of Luther's hymn which had so impressed him that evening when he heard them sung in the Protestant church:

Let goods and kindred go,
This mortal life also;
The body they may kill,
God's truth abideth still,
His kingdom is forever.

THE JESUIT

"I did," replied the cardinal. "Pray take a seat."

"If your Eminence permits, I prefer to stand."

"As you like."

There was a painful pause. Finally, the cardinal spoke.

"It is better for us to go directly to the point, Don Paolo. Perhaps you already suspect why we have called you to our presence. Your own conscience tells you."

Don Paolo did not reply.

"You are suspected of having heretical tendencies. You have been seen reading books written by Protestant authors and attending services in evangelical churches. You are intimate with a well-known evangelical minister and you associate with Protestants. It is surmised that you desire to leave the Church which has sheltered you, educated you, fed and nurtured you, has given you, in short, all that you have ever had."

For the first time Don Paolo flushed deeply. To be accused of holding one's own opinions is not insulting; to be accused of base ingratitude is quite another matter, and wounds a sensitive soul. He glanced at Father Veroni, who was shading his face with his hand.

"Are these things true?" asked the cardinal.

"It is true that I have sought to know more of God's truth; it is true that I have read the Protestant Bible and many other books dealing with evangelical

THE JESUIT

questions. It is true that I have learned much from the Protestant pastor to whom you refer and from other good men. But it is *not* true that I am insensible to the kindness and favor which I have received from my childhood. No, no! that is not true. Father Veroni knows that I can never repay the debt I owe him for all that he has done for me." Father Veroni moved impatiently. "But I am a man, and claim a man's right to think and judge for myself. I can no longer allow the Church to decide for me."

The cardinal looked at him reprovably, yet with a curious air.

"It is not necessary to get excited. We want plain facts. You have acknowledged that the accusations are true."

"The first part of your Eminence's accusations is true."

Again, for a long moment, there was perfect silence in the immense room.

"Will you tell us," said Father Veroni, "why you are willing to confess all this? Why don't you keep silent? You could continue in the priesthood, do your duty faithfully toward the Church, and *think* as you please. Tell us why!"

Father Veroni had removed his hand from his eyes and gazed at Paolo with curiosity. He wanted to know what the power was which gave the boy courage to confess his convictions, to stand up bravely in the cardinal's presence.

THE JESUIT

The young priest's expression changed. It became indescribably sweet and winning.

"At first, I wanted to stay in the Church and *think* as I pleased, obeying her commands and doing my duty toward her. I soon found that this was impossible for me. I could not be a hypocrite. I had found Jesus," he added, softly.

"What!" exclaimed both the cardinal and Father Veroni. "You did what?"

"I found Jesus," repeated Don Paolo, "and he forgave me my sins, he pardoned my transgressions, he led me out of darkness into a great light, he filled my soul with his Spirit and love and bade me take courage and follow him. I must follow my Master openly."

The cardinal spoke to Padre Veroni in an undertone. The priest rose suddenly, came to Paolo's side, and, in those tones which so often strangely moved the hearts of men, began to speak.

"Paolo, my son, I love thee. I have loved thee since the day when thy mother begged me to care for thee as thy dead father would have done. Be not carried away by strange doctrines. Forget these things which have enticed thee from thy Church; put thine heart into thy work. All will be forgiven. There is a brilliant future before thee. Cardinal Perotti will be thy friend. I will assist thee to rise high, higher than thine ambitious thoughts can lead thee to imagine. Thou hast wonderful gifts in speech; use them for the Church and she will reward

THE JESUIT

thee. Forsake not thy Church and those who love thee. Stay with us, Paolo, my son."

Don Paolo trembled. "The way is hard, O Lord!" he said within his soul. He knew that Father Veroni would never have stooped to plead thus with a humble young priest, if he had not loved him. And he knew, too, that there were very few men whom Padre Veroni loved. The words of the man who had been all to him that a father could have been, moved him powerfully.

"I cannot," he murmured. "I must follow my Lord, even though the way be dark and the path stormy."

"Think again," continued Father Veroni. "With us, all that the heart of man desires; with the Protestants, suffering, poverty, humiliation."

Paolo took Father Veroni's hand and clasped it in both of his hands.

"My father, I cannot. I love you and thank you, and would gladly remain, if I could."

Father Veroni drew his hand away, abruptly, almost violently. Without another word he left the library.

The cardinal touched a bell and the secretary appeared, round-eyed and observant.

"Accompany Don Paolo to the door," he said.

Acknowledging courteously the salutation of Don Paolo, the cardinal remained seated in his armchair, tapping his fingers impatiently on the desk beside him, and pondering many questions which concerned

THE JESUIT

the future of his Church. He was not specially agitated over the fact that a young priest had adopted Protestant views and wished to leave the Church. One priest, more or less, made little difference, for it was a great organization and could afford to lose dissatisfied members. His eminence smiled grimly, as he thought that three hundred years before a rebellious priest would not have been treated so gently; he would have suddenly retired from public life to spend his remaining days in repentance for his sins in some obscure monastery, which was practically a prison. In the twentieth century, one used other means of bringing the refractory youth to his senses; excommunication, social ostracism, separation from family—these were powerful weapons.

The cardinal yawned and rang the bell for light. He had only entered into this affair to gratify Father Veroni, who was influential and would, doubtless, be appointed a cardinal at the next Consistory. Padre Veroni's weakness was his extraordinary affection for Paolo Gregori.

It was not the loss of this one priest that disturbed Cardinal Perotti's peace of mind. Unfortunately, this was but an instance, a sign of the times. In the Church and priesthood there were hundreds, perhaps thousands, who were doing their duty and *thinking* as they pleased. What did this presage for the future—reform or revolt?

CHAPTER XVIII

THE die was cast, no matter what the result might be. In spite of his exalted mood and the knowledge that he had acted according to the dictates of his conscience, Paolo could not control the tremor of excitement which agitated him. Would the cardinal and Father Veroni try to prevent his withdrawal from the priesthood? If so, by what means? The uncertainty of his future did not trouble him. He was young, strong, and courageous.

After leaving the cardinal's apartment he walked slowly through the narrow dark streets which are near the Vatican Palace, crossed the bridge spanning the sluggishly flowing Tiber, and continued his way along the busy Corso Vittorio Emmanuele. People jostled him, but he did not notice them. Wagons rattled by and small boys interfered with his progress. He smiled gently and made room for them. It was a day in late winter, and the windows of the tall houses along the wide street were thrown open to admit the mild, soft air. A basket of violets, purple and fragrant, borne on the head of a peasant girl in gay costume, attracted Paolo's attention and aroused him from the consideration of several difficult questions. He purchased a small bunch for a penny and walked on, holding them in his hand.

The modest little flowers, in their simple beauty,

THE JESUIT

cheered and comforted him. As if aided to a decision, he went swiftly toward Mr. Pierce's home, and found speedy entrance into that gentleman's study.

"My dear Don Paolo," said Mr. Pierce. "Come in, I am glad to see you."

As if afraid that he might weaken, if he delayed, Paolo plunged at once into the subject which was so important to him.

"I have just come from Cardinal Perotti."

Mr. Pierce raised his eyebrows questioningly.

"He and Father Veroni asked me many things, to which I replied as truthfully as I could. It is now decided, Signor Pierce. I am ready to leave the priesthood."

He drew a long breath.

"God will surely bless you!" exclaimed Mr. Pierce, heartily. "What are your plans?"

"I have none, sir, except to lay aside this robe."

"Is there anything in the line of work that you know how to do?"

Mr. Pierce could surmise the answer to this question. Don Paolo was only one of many priests who came to him, expressing a desire to leave the Church. Some of them wished the promise of a comfortable support if they resigned their clerical profession, and these went away disappointed. In spite of reports to the contrary, the Protestant Church held out no golden inducements. Others had private reasons for forsaking their religion; they were not on good

THE JESUIT

terms with their bishops; they had misbehaved or disobeyed, or they wished to resign their priestly office in order to marry. Others were sincere, ready to follow Christ at any cost, but—they did not know how to work at any trade or business.

Don Paolo's face grew grave.

"Mr. Pierce, I am ashamed to tell you that I have spent all my life in monastery and school, and while I can talk Latin and am well educated, having the title of Doctor, I cannot work at any trade. If you will help me, I will try to learn."

"That is the right spirit. Have you any private means?"

"Only a few hundred francs left me by my mother at her death. I have an old aunt who is very poor. If I can earn enough to support myself, I should like to give this to her. She will not need to work so hard."

"Does she approve of your leaving the priesthood?"

"She does not know of my intention."

"And when she knows?"

"She will curse the day that I was born into the world to become an apostate," Paolo replied, sadly.

Mr. Pierce could not deny this statement. He was experienced in the life of Rome, and had seen and learned much during the five years of his residence there. He realized what it meant for a man to leave the religion of his fathers, in a country where Catholicism reigned supreme. It meant

THE JESUIT

separation from loved ones, ostracism by all good Roman Catholics, and, very often, a life of hardship. He remembered a morning when a young man, who had been a priest but was then studying for the Protestant ministry, came to him, with tears in his eyes, and showed him a photograph of himself, across which his mother had written the one word: "Traitor!"

"She has returned it to me, with my unopened letters," he said, "and I shall never see her again."

A man must be a hero in Italy if he has the courage to face the sorrow, disgrace, and humiliation which are his lot as soon as he becomes a Protestant. There are such heroes, and they live and die nobly and bravely.

"There is a very small room downstairs behind the church," Mr. Pierce said, rousing himself from these thoughts. "It contains nothing but a bed, a chair, and a washstand. The ceiling is low and there is a small window, admitting little light. It is all I can offer you. Will you accept it?"

"Yes, sir, gladly."

"You may come as soon as you please, but you know that we require a certificate of good conduct from your bishop. Can you obtain that?"

"Easily, provided Cardinal Perotti or Padre Veroni do not interfere."

"It would be wise to attend to it at once. One more thing. Are you willing to come to our church on Sunday evening, and, wearing your priest's dress

THE JESUIT

for the last time, speak to the people and publicly tell your experience and reasons for becoming an evangelical?"

"Certainly. I am not ashamed of what I have done, nor am I afraid to tell about it before all the people of Rome, even those at the Vatican."

These were bold words, but were spoken with such simplicity that they were very impressive, and Mr. Pierce felt, to a greater degree than before, that the priest would be a power for good among his own people.

"In the meantime," continued Don Paolo, "I will make my final arrangements and will seek for work, although I suppose no one will employ me if they see that I am a priest."

Mr. Pierce suppressed a smile as he noted the scholarly, cultured face, the delicate white hands of this man who had passed his life in the cloisters of a monastery and in the college. But he made no remark. Let him seek for work and prove what sort of metal was in him. Many of the priests desired to study for the ministry at once. Paolo Gregori had made no such suggestion, nor had he asked for money.

There was no difficulty about obtaining the certificate of good conduct from the bishop. Apparently the cardinal and Father Veroni had not considered the matter of sufficient importance to warrant their interference. To be sure, the document was accompanied by a severe letter from his

THE JESUIT

superior, condemning Paolo's action, accusing him of base motives for leaving the Church, and bewailing the liberal spirit of the times. Paolo was now free to follow his own inclinations. He wrote a very affectionate letter to his aunt on Saturday morning, and after mailing it at a box on the nearest street corner he walked slowly to the Monastery on the hillside.

Try as we will, we cannot altogether ignore or forget old friends or early associations, even though the path, which opens before us, leads in a totally different direction toward a goal of our own choosing. The monks in the cloisters, the roses in the garden, the grape arbors, shading moss-grown paths, even old Frou-Frou on his perch by the kitchen door, were dear to Paolo Gregori. He knew that he should find Fra Antonio busy in the garden this fine morning, preparing the ground for the seeds of flowers and vegetables. Yes, there he was, bending laboriously over his task, sifting the earth in his fingers, gently and carefully, as if he loved it. He began to grow old, did Fra Antonio, and when he raised his head at the sound of footsteps, his sight was blurred, and he did not recognize "the boy" until he was very close to him.

"It is thou, Paolo, at last!" he exclaimed. "Why hast thou forsaken thine old friend? It is a long time since thou wast here! We have longed for thee."

"I have been busy, dear Fra Antonio," Paolo

THE JESUIT

replied, evasively. "You are tired, Brother. Come and sit down on the bench and rest while we talk. I have something to tell you."

"It is good for old bones to rest a while. The work is hard, boy."

"But you love it."

"Yes. I love it. I should have come to thee, to see how the world treats thee, but I hated to leave my garden and my flowers."

"I fear that you love your garden and your flowers better than you do your prayers and penance," responded Paolo, mischievously.

Fra Antonio threw a quick glance at him and then lowered his eyes demurely, making no reply.

The air in the Monastery garden was redolent with odors of spring, although snow lay, white and glistening, on the summit of the Sabine Hills, far away on the borders of the Campagna. Insects, heralds of warm weather, were buzzing around the early blossoms which were already turning their faces upward to the sun. Here, in the garden, white crocuses, masses of blue violets, yellow daffodils and golden-hearted jonquils were already in bloom.

"What is the matter with thee?" Fra Antonio asked, suddenly, laying his horny, brown hand on Paolo's white one. "Thou lookest pale and weary. Thou hast changed much since that day when I gathered the grapes from yonder arbor."

"And gave me the smallest bunch you could find, bad Brother Antonio! I have come to tell you some-

THE JESUIT

thing. Tomorrow evening, I go to the Protestant church—you know where the big building is?”

The monk nodded assent.

“And, for the last time, I shall wear this priest’s gown. I am going to become an evangelical.”

Holding his breath, Paolo waited for an outbreak of indignation. To his astonishment, none came. Fra Antonio still grasped his hand, affectionately, and his gaze was fixed upon a cluster of violets growing at the foot of a large rose tree. A strange smile was on the old monk’s lips. Finally, he turned and his eyes met Paolo’s. There was a smile in his eyes also.

“It was scarcely necessary that thou shouldst tell me this. I have known for a long time that some conflict was taking place in thy mind. Even as a child thou wishedst always to know the reasons for everything. The iron bands of our Church which hold us closely confined to her decrees were too tight for thee. Thou art not willing to believe as she says and do as she bids, but thou must find out for thyself.”

“Not exactly that,” objected Paolo.

Fra Antonio continued: “Were I twenty years younger, I would go with thee, but now, it is too late.”

These words were so totally unexpected, that Paolo was speechless with surprise. The idea, that in the dull brain of the monk, who seemed to know little except his gardening and pruning, there had

THE JESUIT

been doubts and uncertainties, was a new one to him.

"It will not be possible for thee to come and see me again, Paolo, but I will come to thee."

"And leave your garden and flowers, Brother?"

"Yes, for love of thee."

There were tears now in the monk's eyes.

Paolo put his arm around him.

"Come out into the world with me, Brother Antonio. I will work for us both."

"I dare not leave the Monastery. I am an old man and my heart is here with my flowers. Thou wilt work, thou sayest, out in the wide world? I fear thou wilt starve, my boy! What canst thou do for a living?"

"Little, I fear; but I will try to learn. Why didn't you teach me the gardening trade, Fra Antonio? Then I might be a useful workingman."

Fra Antonio laughed.

"Because thou lovedst thy books better than my flowers and vegetables. Thou art a scholar, and I, a gardener. Each has his place, and thou wilt find thy work out yonder, but it will not be digging or planting. Thou wast surprised that I showed so little astonishment when thou didst tell me thy secret. We have ours, too, in the Monastery."

Very cautiously, and with many a glance around him to see whether he was being watched by any of the monks, Fra Antonio drew a folded newspaper from a big pocket beneath his coarse brown frock

THE JESUIT

and handed it to Paolo. Opening it, the heading in large letters, "L'Evangelista," was plainly visible.

"It is one of the Protestant newspapers!" exclaimed Paolo. "Where did you get it?"

"Did I not tell thee that we, too, have our secrets?"

"Where did you get it?" repeated Paolo.

"Thou wilt not tell?" The monk's tone was questioning and doubtful.

"Of course not."

"Fra Silvestro has a brother who was a Franciscan friar—not in this Monastery—but who became an evangelical and is now a minister. A friend of his gives Fra Silvestro the paper every week. We pass it around from one to the other of the monks who are to be trusted."

"It is dangerous. Suppose the Superior should find it out."

Fra Antonio shrugged his shoulders.

"That is a possibility at any moment. Since his brother left the Monastery, Fra Silvestro has been somewhat under suspicion."

"I will provide you with more good reading matter, Fra Antonio. But the sun is setting and I must go. The Abbot will not invite me to remain to supper tonight."

"He does not know what you intend to do."

"I am not so sure about that. What Padre Veroni knows about me, he has probably told the Abbot. I am under the ban."

THE JESUIT

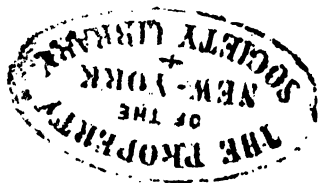
"Is Padre Veroni very angry with thee?"

"He is grieved and hurt. However, he will soon forget so humble a person as Paolo Gregori."

"Addio," said the monk; "I will come to see thee, but thou must send me word where to find thee."

"I will do so," replied Paolo. "Addio, Fra Antonio."

The old monk shook his head slowly when he was alone. "Padre Veroni does not forget easily," he muttered, "but in the midst of his great schemes he may let little grievances go unremembered."



CHAPTER XIX

SIR JOHN HAMILTON accompanied Janet to the Protestant church on the Sunday evening when Don Paolo was to speak to the people and wear his black robes for the last time. The hall was already full when they entered it, and it was difficult for them to find a seat. It was not an unusual occurrence for a priest to leave the Roman Catholic Church, or for him to speak publicly in this edifice, but in the case of Paolo Gregori, the interest was accentuated by the fact that he had already gained considerable reputation as a preacher, and that he was a canon of one of the largest churches in Rome.

Don Paolo's face was very pale and his hands trembled. It was a crucial moment for him, and, notwithstanding his sincere conviction that he was doing right, and his absolute willingness to make a public statement, he was nervous. This feeling left him, however, when he arose to address the large audience. People were coming in from the street, for the service was held at an hour when many pedestrians were passing by, and when they saw a priest in the pulpit they pushed up toward the front, until the aisles were crowded with interested listeners. An Italian congregation is frequently composed of restless, moving men and women; tonight they were quiet, held by the spell of a powerful

orator, who spoke words which came directly from his heart. There was no abuse of the Roman Catholic Church, no condemnation of its doctrines, except when necessary to explain his own position. Paolo Gregori told the simple story of his conversion, of the wonderful manner in which he had been led to know the Saviour, not through forms and ceremonies, not through the mass, but through God's Holy Spirit working upon his heart. He had realized that Christ died for him, a sinner, and by direct access to his Lord, through prayer, he had obtained forgiveness of his sins.

All this he narrated in such simple, yet eloquent language, that the hundreds of listeners remained, spellbound, until the last word had been spoken, and, at the close, they silently left the church.

That night Paolo Gregori, no longer a priest, knelt beside his plain iron bed in a humbler room than the cell which he had occupied in the Monastery. His soul was full of peace, even though a strange and, perhaps, precarious future lay before him. He did not know what difficulties he might have to confront. God's peace was his, and he intended to go bravely forward.

Folding his priest's garments, he laid them aside, and in the morning, dressed in plain clothes, for the first time since he was a boy, he went out into the streets, to seek work which would keep him from starving.

"That young man is a remarkable speaker," said

Sir John, as he and Janet walked back to the pension.

"I could not understand much of what he said, but it must have been impressive or the people would not have listened so well. I noticed several men who nodded their heads approvingly at some of his statements. And there was only one man who hissed."

"Yes. Those who sat near him frowned him down. I can never get over wondering why people here in Rome listen so quietly to such an address as that. In England or America, it would almost be thought necessary to call in a guard of police on such an occasion, for fear of a hostile demonstration. But here in Rome, in the very heart of Catholicism, one hears scarcely a murmur of disapproval; and it is not necessary to get the young priest out safely by a back door. I like that fellow. He is sincere. I must ask Pierce what I can do to help him. Perhaps he does not realize what an uphill life he will have here. To tell the truth, Miss Lapeer, I admire their courage immensely when they leave the priesthood. They fight against tremendous odds. The Church is very powerful and controls many branches of business, as well as pretty nearly everything else, except the government, and, in regard to that, the Vatican party is only biding its time."

"Yes," said Janet.

Sir John noticed the tone of weariness and un-

derstood it so well that he stopped talking and contented himself by showing his sympathy in that way.

Fay had now openly joined the Roman Catholic Church, and Janet felt that the inevitable separation between the sister, whom she so dearly loved, and herself, had already begun. She had made every effort to hide her sorrow when Fay, evidently very nervous, had told her of her intentions.

Janet had endeavored to sympathize as much as possible with her sister's views. How Fay could change her faith, Janet, with her nature, could not understand. If, however, Fay felt that she was doing right, she would not argue the question, but would accept the situation, much as it pained her. With the hope that, after all, they might not be separated in their love for each other, even though their religious views were so different, Janet accompanied her mother to the little church where Fay was rebaptized in the Roman Catholic faith.

Mrs. Lapeer remained placid under these new circumstances, and seemed to consider Fay's change of religion a necessary part of her marriage to the marquis.

Strange to say, it was her future husband who made the most serious objection to her conversion. He told Fay plainly that, as far as he was concerned, although he was a Roman Catholic by baptism, and would probably have the last sacraments administered in case he was near death, "as a matter of precaution," he added, smiling satirically, he

had not the slightest objection to marrying a Protestant; in fact, rather preferred it, for reasons of his own. She need not trouble to change her faith on his account.

When Fay assured him that she was not taking this step on his account, but because she wanted to, the marquis shrugged his shoulders, twisted his moustache nervously, and told her that she was, of course, at liberty to worship God as she preferred.

Sir John knew, as well as Janet did, that his sister was responsible for much of this change of view; her influence over Fay had been unusual. When the big man from the ranch in California first learned that Fay was to be rebaptized as a Roman Catholic he put on his hat and fled to his customary place of refuge, the broad and lonely Campagna, where he could work off his excitement in walking very fast, imagining himself to be on a prairie which he loved out in the far West. His anger was not directed against his sister; he considered her to be a mere tool in the hands of a priest who was wily, powerful and accomplished in the knowledge of human nature and its weaknesses. Lady Eger was failing, slowly, surely, and her condition aroused Fay's deep sympathy. She spent hours in the invalid's room, and on sunny, warm days they drove out together, going frequently to the convent where Floria di Cassini was, or to other convents which Lady Eger loved to visit.

The marquis urged a speedy marriage, but, to the

surprise of Mrs. Lapeer and Janet, and in spite of her mother's remonstrances, Fay refused to consider any fixed date. There was no sign that she regretted her engagement, for it was very evident that she dearly loved the man whom she was to marry.

On closer acquaintance, Janet had grown to respect the marquis more and more. He had proved himself to be a nobleman in more than name, a man of strong character, firm will and profound convictions. Janet felt that since this union had come about so naturally, it must be right. She wondered at Fay's hesitation in regard to the date of the marriage, which was to take place, according to the general consent, during the spring months.

Lent began late that year, and after a series of carnival festivities, of late hours and much gayety, Fay devoted herself, with the zeal of a young convert, to prayer and fasting. Hour after hour she passed in Lady Eger's quiet room, which the invalid rarely left now. Twice a week she went to the convent where Floria was preparing for the final taking of the veil, which would divide her forever from her family and the world. The American girl invariably returned from these visits in an absorbed, dreamy frame of mind, and they were followed by long fasting and nightly devotions, which lasted until dawn lightened the eastern sky with its mystic glow. Several times Romilda found her lying in a faint on the floor in front of the crucifix, fastened to the wall over a priedieu.

The maid gently lifted her young mistress and, laying her on the bed, called Janet. Together, they gave her restoratives until the beautiful dark blue eyes, which the marquis compared to Roman violets, opened, and she threw her arms around Janet's neck.

It was after such occurrences as these that Romilda would go about for hours with a sullen face, and was heard to mutter words about "priests" and "foolishness" and "killing Miss Fay." Romilda was warm-hearted and affectionate, so grateful for the money which had effected her escape from a life which she detested, that she would have made any sacrifice for Janet or Fay.

Romilda became so disturbed at last that she summoned up courage to meet the marquis in the hall one evening when he came. Nervously twisting her apron, and with cheeks that burned with fear because of her temerity in addressing him, she told him the truth, how Miss Fay was growing thin from her long prayers and loss of sleep.

Very much troubled by this information, the marquis thanked Romilda, putting a piece of silver into her hands which brought a smile to her face, and entered Mrs. Lapeer's private parlor. Sir John was translating an editorial in the evening paper, and the marquis motioned him to continue, seating himself after a silent greeting to the three ladies. His interest was aroused when he found that it referred to the bill concerning Saint Joseph's College at

V—. This bill was soon to come up before Parliament and it had already aroused a great deal of discussion in the press.

"What do you think of it?" inquired Sir John, when he had finished reading. "Of course, this is a Liberal paper and this editorial is written from that standpoint."

"And for that reason must be prejudiced," interrupted Fay.

The marquis smiled at her enthusiasm and replied: "I think it is a fair and just statement. There is no more reason why the government should consent to favor this bill for Saint Joseph's School than for many other such institutions now maintained by the Church in Italy. It is a precedent, and ought not to be passed."

"Then you will vote against it?" said Sir John, looking at the marquis with some curiosity.

"Such is my intention. By the way, it is very probable that the bill will come up on Thursday afternoon. Would you enjoy hearing the debate?"

"I should be greatly interested."

"And the ladies also?"

Janet replied that she would like very much to go.

Noticing that Fay had left the room, the marquis followed her into a small library, not hearing the words which Sir John spoke to Janet in an undertone: "I can't help liking him! He is a *man*."

Fay was standing at the window, looking out into

the dark street with eyes which saw nothing. At the sound of footsteps she turned and Guido was startled to see that she had been weeping.

"Fay," he said, tenderly, "what is the matter, darling? Why do you cry?"

"Guido," she replied, laying her hand on his arm, "promise me something. I have asked few favors from you."

"If it is in my power, I will gladly do what you wish."

"Please vote in favor of that bill on Thursday."

He gazed at her in astonishment. What possible interest could Fay Lapeer have in a bill which concerned Saint Joseph's College at V—? It seemed so absurd that he smiled.

"Is that what your heart is set on, dear? Are these tears for Saint Joseph's College? Dear Fay, it is a question more important than you think, for you know little of our politics here in Italy. Believe me, I do not want you to enter into such matters. Leave it to us, and occupy your mind with pretty clothes and books and flowers. They are more suitable than politics for a beautiful woman."

"You will not vote against it, Guido," she persisted, ignoring his jesting words. "For my sake, you will not. I plead with you. I feel that such an action will bring disaster and trouble upon us."

"You are overwrought," he responded. "Sit down here and let us talk it over. Were you up all night, praying? You will kill yourself, at this

rate. Even my mother, who is as ardent a Catholic as one can find in Rome, does not exhaust her strength by these long vigils. Be as religious as you please—it is necessary for you women to have a faith to lean upon—but do not injure your health.”

She sat down on the sofa, and allowed him to arrange some pillows that she might be more comfortable. All the time her eyes were centered pleadingly on his face. It distressed him to see that she was terribly in earnest.

“You will favor the bill, Guido,” she repeated. “It will be for our happiness. I feel it; I know it.”

“Do you wish me to act against my convictions, dear Fay?” Guido was serious now, as he observed that she was deeply moved for some reason which he could not understand.

She hesitated. “If it is for the advantage of the Church,” Fay replied, speaking very slowly.

The marquis could scarcely restrain a movement of impatience. All his life he had been under the yoke of the Church; his mother regarded that as the end and aim of every action. Whatever was for the advancement of the Church must be done, no matter what one’s own personal views were. Floria must be laid as a sacrifice on the altar of the Church. He must be a mere puppet in the hands of the priests, must think as they thought, vote as they dictated. A feeling of great uneasiness possessed him. He was to marry an American girl, but she, too, would look to the Church and priests for guidance.

He could not be master in his own household; the priest would be first, and at the confessional all the private affairs of his family would be disclosed. His wife would act as the confessor advised her to.

Rising, he paced the floor, rapidly. He loved Fay, and through his love he would guard and keep her, poor child!

Coming to her side, he looked down at her and spoke very gently.

"Fay, dear, you must leave this and many other things to me. My conscience and not the Church must govern my actions."

When the marquis left her Fay was calm, but he was disturbed in mind and preferred to walk home in the cool air, that he might think of her words and strange interest in this bill. There must be a reason for her excitement and anxiety. In Rome, there were always wheels within wheels. Someone must be behind all this. Could it be Lady Eger? That seemed impossible. The last time he had seen her she had been too weak and ill to concern herself in Saint Joseph's College.

He acknowledged the respectful salutation of the porter at the entrance to his own home and went with weary tread to his library in the wing of the palace.

Seated at his desk, he drew toward him a file of letters and documents; then pushing them aside, he leaned his head on his hand and thought, seriously. Who could be intimidating Fay?

THE JESUIT

Suddenly he remembered. In that chair, yonder, Father Veroni had sat, his face as calm as an ivory carving, his long, white hands resting on the griffins' heads which ornamented the arms. The priest had urged him to vote for the bill, had spoken significantly of Fay, and had also given a half-veiled threat as he left.

"What deviltry is he up to?" queried the marquis, with an irreverence which would have shocked his mother. "He is playing a deep game, with Fay, little Fay, as a pawn in his skilled fingers. She shall marry me at once and I will protect her from him and others of his kind. By Heaven I *will!*"

Bold as the words were, the marquis felt a sinking fear at his heart. Could he hope to cope with such a man as Father Veroni?

"I will vote against that bill," he murmured, setting his teeth stubbornly; "I will marry Fay Lapeer, and I will win the game yet."

If he could have seen Fay Lapeer at that moment, his heart would have bled with sorrow and anxiety. Before her crucifix she lay, prostrate, her arms thrown out above her head, her whole attitude one of despair and supplication.

"O Christ! save him from his sins!" she prayed. "O Mary, Mother of God! shed thy love around him and draw him back to the Church. If it must be through me, if I must atone for him, in order that he may be saved, give me strength for the sacrifice and help me to bear it."

Fay, the light-hearted, almost frivolous girl, had become the clay in the potter's hands, and her character was being formed as he willed. Pliable, gentle, yielding, she was easily influenced to believe that her lover's salvation depended upon her. There was also a strain of stubbornness in her character, which enabled her to continue in a certain course of action if she was thoroughly convinced that she ought to do so.

It was a very determined man who insisted the next day that Fay should fix the date of their marriage for the week after Easter. He found her sweet, gentle, with dark rings under her eyes, telling of the long night's prayers, but as unyielding as ever.

"Be patient a little longer, Guido. That which you ask, I cannot grant. I promise, however, that on Easter Sunday, I will give you a positive answer." With that reply he was forced to be content.

On Thursday afternoon, Fay Lapeer entered Lady Eger's room, where the invalid lay in a reclining chair. She looked out upon the world now with eyes which had in them the dawning light of eternity.

"You are going to Parliament this afternoon, Fay?"

"Yes. Guido will vote against the bill, Hortense."

Lady Eger's face flushed quickly, with excitement, but she made no reply. A strange look passed

THE JESUIT

between the two women. It told of confidences and fears, of dread and longing.

Fay closed the door softly and went down to join Janet and Sir John. Lady Eger lay very still, alone. Fay had been to her a lovely vision of young life. Dressed in a well-fitting gown of dark blue cloth, wearing a large hat from which two costly plumes fell gracefully over her fair hair; with a face full of beauty and gentleness, she seemed to stand at the threshold of a happy and prosperous future.

Lady Eger shivered as if she were cold, and drew the coverlet closer around her. Raising an ivory rosary to her lips, she kissed it, closed her eyes in devotion and began to tell her beads.

The Parliament House was full this afternoon. A very large proportion of the Deputies were present and the boxes in the galleries were crowded with ladies and gentlemen. There were murmurs of pleasant voices, a hum of liquid, musical Italian, and a general air of excitement as the discussion of the bill concerning Saint Joseph's College at V— was opened.

Italians are very frank in expressing their opinion on political questions, and Sir John soon observed that the persons near him were divided between the two parties, Clerical and Liberal. Expressions of disapproval were not lacking when the Deputy who was speaking said something objectionable to one party or the other.

Marquis di Cassini glanced up at the box where

THE JESUIT

Fay sat, and there was an appeal in the look. It is not easy for a man to refuse the woman he loves the first favor she asks, or to deliberately oppose her wishes. He rose, and boldly, eloquently, opposed the passage of the bill. Fay had never been so proud of him as she was at that moment, when he was speaking against that which she had reasons for desiring. He was doing what he thought to be right, and Fay would not have been a true woman if she had not respected him more for adhering to his own opinion. But O! he did not know what this meant for her—for them both!

It was said, afterward, that such a fine and telling speech was seldom heard in the Chamber of Deputies. The members of the Clerical party tried in every way to confuse and stop the marquis, but unsuccessfully. He carried himself with dignity, spoke with grace and propriety, and won the day.

Sir John reached over and shook hands with Fay. "I congratulate you, as well as the marquis," he said, cordially. "He has a brilliant political career before him."

To his surprise, he saw that she was very pale and trembled.

"Your sister is tired. Shall we go?" he asked Janet, who replied: "Certainly. I am ready."

But Fay insisted upon remaining until the vote was taken. It was unfavorable, the bill being defeated by a large majority.

In the box, near Sir John, sat a young man who

THE JESUIT

appeared to be unusually interested in the marquis and his speech, as well as in the results of the vote. He was an exceedingly spruce young man, with waxed moustaches, and black hair brushed to satin smoothness. He took full notes of the marquis' speech and also put down the figures of the vote. As soon as that was over he took his hat, bowed profoundly to the ladies, and departed.

"A reporter, probably," suggested Janet.

"Very likely," responded Sir John, as they, too, joined many others who were now leaving the Parliament building.

Yes, the spruce young man was a reporter, but not on the staff of a daily newspaper. He lost no time in arriving at Cardinal's Perotti's apartment, presenting himself at the door opening on a broad terrace, or porch, whose floor was paved with majolica tiles, and whose stone balustrade was adorned with century plants and small palms. This terrace overlooked a large, shady garden.

Cardinal Perotti sat by a table, on which were two flasks of wine, one white and one red. Near him was Father Veroni. In the afternoon light, the priest's face was more waxlike than ever, his regular features appeared more delicate and accentuated.

"Enrico!" said the cardinal.

"I am here, Eminenza," replied his secretary.

"The vote is taken?"

"Yes, Eminenza."

"Let me see your notes."

The secretary laid before the cardinal the paper on which he had written the figures.

"It is unfavorable," the cardinal remarked to Father Veroni.

The priest poured some red wine into a glass and drank it, with deliberation.

"Is that all, Enrico? If so, you may retire."

Even the waxed ends of the secretary's moustache quivered with excitement as he replied: "It is not all. I have here the notes of the main points in the speech made by Marquis di Cassini."

Father Veroni set his glass very gently on the table. So, Guido had made a speech. Bold and stubborn boy!

"It was the success of the day and influenced the vote," added Enrico. His sharp eyes could not detect any special sign of interest in his news. It was a disappointment.

"You may go, Enrico, and thank you."

"It is a sign of the times," the cardinal added, to Father Veroni, who again sipped his wine with the enjoyment of an epicure.

"This is a fine brand," he remarked.

"From my own vineyards in Tuscany," replied the cardinal. "What are you going to do now, my friend?"

"I must keep an appointment for six o'clock," Father Veroni said, blandly.

"You know that I do not mean that. What is the next step after this?"

THE JESUIT

"I do not exactly know, your Eminence. Good-by."

The cardinal laughed when the door closed behind his guest.

Half an hour later, Father Veroni entered Lady Eger's room. This was the appointment he had mentioned to the cardinal and a very important one it was to Father Veroni.



CHAPTER XX

It was Easter morning in Rome! Roses, lilies, violets, pansies—a glorious confusion of color on the Spanish Stairs, odors of blossoms from gardens hidden behind gray walls, over which stray branches drooped to offer temptation to the passer-by; orange groves, whose glossy-leaved trees were laden with golden fruit and blooms of overpowering fragrance; fountains playing merrily in sunlight which changed the falling drops to broken jewels of many hues; this was Rome at Easter.

Janet awoke with a feeling of great joy. All was gladness about her. Church bells were ringing cheerily, a contrast to the silence since Good Friday when they had no longer been rung anywhere in Rome. She rose and dressed, accompanying her mother to service, where Mr. Pierce preached an excellent sermon to an audience sadly diminished because of the fine music to be heard at Saint John Lateran and Saint Peter's. There were tall madonna lilies in front of the pulpit, and extra music was provided. It was a restful, pleasant service and Janet returned home even happier than when she left it.

Marquis di Cassini was also very happy on this Easter Day. Fay had been "in retreat" in a convent for two weeks. She had felt it her duty to

THE JESUIT

separate herself from the world during Passion Week, in order that her mind might dwell entirely upon spiritual things. On the afternoon of Easter Sunday, she was to return to her mother and sister. The marquis, not having written to her or heard from her for two long weeks, was eager to see her again. His mother and sisters went dutifully to mass, but he entered his motor car and took a long spin outside the walls, the brightness and cheer, the flowers and warmth adding to his happiness. This afternoon Fay would tell him what she had decided about the date of their wedding; she had promised to do this on Easter Day.

Preparations were already being made for the reception of the bride. Hundreds of workmen were busy repairing, renovating, and decorating a large, handsome apartment on the main floor of the Casini Palace. New draperies, new furniture had been ordered by the marquis, according to Fay's taste. He spared no expense in preparing a home for the woman whom he had chosen for his wife. On this Easter Day he had forgotten the fears which had haunted him since the rejection of the bill concerning Saint Joseph's College at V—. After all, those were only imaginary forebodings. Nothing could happen to separate him from Fay.

It was in this mood that he went that afternoon to the Pension Speranza and inquired whether Miss Fay Lapeer was at home. Although a little surprised when told that she had not yet returned, he

felt no alarm. She might have preferred to pass this Sunday at the convent. But still he felt a vague uneasiness.

In the evening he went again, and saw Janet, who was still in the happy mood which had possessed her all day.

"Fay has not yet come," she said.

"Hasn't she written?"

"No. You remember that she wished to be quite alone, quite undisturbed during these two weeks. We have not heard one word from her since she left. She will come tomorrow morning. You know she is very fond of the nuns and they may have persuaded her to stay until tomorrow."

The marquis was very much troubled. It was strange that Fay had not sent any word, if not to him, then to her mother. The more he pondered it the stranger it seemed. Yet, since Janet was so sure that all was right, he did not wish to alarm her needlessly.

Janet came down to her breakfast earlier than usual. In the shadows of the night she, too, had begun to feel anxious about her sister. She had not approved of this going into "retreat," but it was useless to argue with Fay. Perhaps she was ill. In that case the nuns should have let her mother know at once. Janet had felt easier about her sister when she knew that her two weeks of devotion were to be passed at a convent where she and Lady Eger were in the habit of going frequently. She resolved that

after breakfast she would go to the convent herself with Romilda and make inquiries.

Before she had finished her light repast of coffee and rolls Sir John came to her table and, drawing up a chair, sat down. It was evident that he was worried and wanted to talk to someone. Sir John and Janet were very good friends. He was so strong, so good. Janet felt that she could trust him implicitly.

"How is your sister this morning, Sir John?"

"Very weak. It strikes me that something is worrying her, but I cannot find out what it is. Since she became a Roman Catholic, she does not confide in me as she used to do. Hortense and I were such good friends formerly. If I only knew what was troubling her, perhaps I could help her."

He was nervously playing with a knife on the table and did not notice the sudden tears which came to Janet's eyes. She had felt the change in Fay already. There were no more confidences at bedtime. Her sister had become reserved, careful of her words. She felt the reaction from the happy Easter, and she was anxious about Fay.

"You may be interested in hearing what has been the fortune of that young ex-priest, Miss Lapeer," Sir John said, suddenly changing a subject which was painful to them both. "If you have finished your breakfast, come into the other room and I will tell you about it. We can talk without being overheard. I declare," he continued, follow-

ing Janet out of the dining room, "if I stay much longer in Rome, I shall become suspicious of everyone. I imagine that there are spies around me; I see a Jesuit in every waiter and a disguised priest in the man who cuts my hair."

Janet laughed. Sir John was so original that he always cheered her.

"I hope you are not suspicious of me," she said, settling herself comfortably. It was a little early to go to the convent. She would wait till nine o'clock, and then, if Fay had not come, she would call Romilda and go out.

"Not yet. The story of that ex-priest is exactly in point. It is a strange one. Some one is working against him."

"Could it be—" Janet paused and Sir John completed the sentence:

"Father Veroni? It may be; but, honestly, I doubt it. Father Veroni is skilled in diplomacy, in power over men and women and in his trade—if I may call it so. He works in the interests of his Church. But I cannot believe that he would descend to persecuting a young man whom he had once loved. Still, I may not judge him rightly. You know how little reason I have to love Father Veroni, and you know my opinion of the system of which he is a representative; so I am not prejudiced when I say that I do not think he would waste his time on petty revenge when he is interested in great schemes."

"What about Signor Grego

"Well, he had a little mon
than a thousand francs, which
a hard-working old aunt, whom
He kept a hundred francs for hi
it would be sufficient to maintain
find work. One hundred franc
Miss Lapeer, as you and I know
place in a shop where they paid
him plain food, and Mr. Pierce
in a little room behind the chu
that situation exactly three day

"Didn't he do his work well

"Excellently. Even the pro
that. On the third morning,
the shop and inquired of Paolo
articles. By the way, that fe
out to me since, and I reco
remember a reporter in our l
Deputies? He took notes o
speech."

"Yes. He had exceed
eyes."

"Oiled his hair!" grum
of disgust. "I fancy he is
I am convinced that it is
Gregori so much trouble."

"Who is he?"

"That's what Pierce a
may be that he is acting

haps you could interest the marquis in the case. He has no love for the Clericals."

"Perhaps I can."

"To make a long story short. After that youth looked around a little he called on the proprietor and, an hour later, Gregori was out of a place."

"Why?"

"The proprietor said he was quite satisfied with his work, but there were reasons why he could not employ him. He declined to state the reasons. Since then Gregori has been employed in three different places, recommended by Pierce or myself, and from each one, he has been dismissed after a few days. In one case it was frankly stated by a member of the firm that they had learned that he was an ex-priest and it would be an injury to their business to retain him. This was at a large jewelry store on the Corso, where I got him in. I went myself to the head of the establishment, whom I know personally, and told him that I could not understand it. The fellow did his work well and it was an offense to me if they dismissed him. You know that jewels are Hortense's weakness and she likes good ones, too. I have spent a great deal of money in that shop, buying her Christmas and birthday presents. I blustered a little for Gregori's sake, but it was no use. Am I keeping you, Miss Lapeer?"

Janet had stealthily looked at her watch. She was secretly growing more and more anxious because Fay did not come.

"I have ten minutes yet before nine o'clock. Then, I must go out."

"There isn't much more. The gentleman regretted, and so forth, but he *dared* not employ a man who had left the priesthood. Many of his best clients were strong Clericals. I asked him whether he was not afraid of losing the trade of English-speaking Protestants by refusing to deal justly with a man who was trying to earn an honest living. He replied, with a smile: 'Ah! you Protestants are so broad in your views! Everyone knows that much of the money for the support of Catholic institutions of charity comes from generous contributions by English and American Protestants. Personally, I like the young man, but I cannot retain him in my service.' The proprietor was a Jew, Miss Lapeer, and not a Roman Catholic, so you can see that he meant what he said. He did not dare employ Paolo Gregori."

"It is a strange story," said Janet, rising. "What will he do now?"

"Who knows?" replied Sir John. "I have an idea that Pierce intends to give him a chance to preach. He is a born orator and a student. His place is not behind a counter, or at a bookkeeper's desk. But he wishes first to make a thorough trial of his sincerity. Certainly, Gregori is working much harder for his daily bread than he ever did before; and if he is not in earnest, he will soon get tired of it and go back into the priesthood as a good

many others have done before him. I fear that I have detained you, Miss Lapeer."

The truth was that Janet was now so nervous that she had not heard the last sentences of Sir John's account.

Janet met the porter at the door, as she went out to find Romilda.

"There is a letter for you, miss."

It was addressed in Fay's handwriting. With a strange and overpowering sensation of fear, as if a great disaster were soon to befall her, Janet hurried to her own room, locked the door, and opened the letter.



CHAPTER XXI

DARLING MOTHER AND SISTER: When you read this I shall be gone from you forever, dead to the world and its affections which separate us from the spiritual and heavenly life. Do not grieve, for I shall be happy in the knowledge that I am doing what is right, what is my duty toward those who have been so dear to me.

It has been shown me that only by the sacrifice of myself can I help to save you both, and him whose wife I was to have been. Earthly love can be mine no more. I shall be the bride of Christ and my days and nights will be spent in prayer for those who are not believers in the true faith, or have wandered far from it.

This is not a sudden step on my part. So important a decision was not hastily made. I have been considering it for weeks, and since I have been in the convent I have felt more and more that it was my duty. My only regret is that I was so weak that I could not bring myself to a decision earlier. This lack of firmness in my character will bring great suffering, I fear, to Guido. I weep when I think of it. But it is inevitable. It is largely because I love him so dearly that I make the sacrifice. As Christ died for us that we might be saved from our sins, I believe that by dying to the world, I can save him.

It would have been different if he had yielded to the will of the Church; but he could not. Now, I trust, that through God's mercy he may turn from the world and give his life and his talents to that Church which must be first, before our families, our loved ones, or our country.

Please give Guido the inclosed letter. I hope—O, I pray!—that he will not suffer much. I could not help doing what I have done.

And, mother and Janet, when you think of me, remember that I am at peace with God, and very happy.

Do not try to find me. It will be worse than useless, for I am going where I shall be completely cut off from any associations with the world. I want to lose myself in prayer and devotion. Some day, when our lives are done, and you and Guido have come into the true Church, we may be permitted to meet again. Your very affectionate

FAY.

Janet read the letter several times before her dazed brain could comprehend what it meant. At last, she arrived at a full consciousness of the terrible grief which had come to them, a grief which would be inconsolable as long as their lives should continue. Fay, her sister, the promised wife of Marquis di Cassini, had entered a convent, would become a nun, forgetting her obligations to her mother and sister and to him who loved her. A sacrifice! Yes, a needless sacrifice, according to Janet's views.

"O, how can I tell mother?" said Janet, speaking aloud in the intensity of her feeling. "It will kill her. And Guido! poor fellow! It was not right for Fay to do this dreadful thing! It was not right."

Since coming to Rome Mrs. Lapeer had developed nerves, a part of her physical organization which she had not thought about before. Her usual placidity was disturbed by the complete change of scene and customs, and Fay's engagement to the marquis had thrown her into a state of excitement which caused agitation and irritability. Her heart was set on this marriage and, outside of her grief for her daughter, the disappointment would be very grave and its consequent effect upon her nervous system very serious. Although Fay had not settled on the date of her marriage, she had allowed her mother to give orders for the trousseau. Milliners and dressmakers were already busy at work for her,

and in the convent where there were fine embroiderers, an extensive outfit of filmy, dainty underwear was being prepared. Mrs. Lapeer would be heartbroken, and humiliated as well, by Fay's action.

"I cannot tell her," groaned Janet, letting the letters fall into her lap, while she tried to collect her thoughts. She had only two friends in Rome, in this great city of mystery: Alda Pierce and Sir John.

"I will ask Alda to come," she decided, and going to the telephone, called up the Pierces.

"No one is at home," the maid said. "The whole family have gone to the country for the day. They will not be back until late."

It was a real disappointment in this hour when she needed help so sorely. Sir John remained, and she was relieved to see his tall figure coming down the corridor. Sir John would tell her what to do.

It was Sir John who calmed her with comforting words when she broke out into a torrent of weeping as she tried to tell him the terrible news; it was Sir John who advised her to wait a few hours before informing her mother, who was in bed with a nervous headache, and it was to him that she consigned the letter Fay had sent for the marquis.

To take that letter to the marquis was the hardest thing Sir John ever did. Twice that morning, Guido had telephoned to know whether Fay had returned, and once he came himself, but Janet was able to avoid seeing him.

THE JESUIT

Sir John squared his shoulders and went to the Cassini palace just after luncheon. He asked for Marquis di Cassini and placed the letter in his hands, leaving the room and house at once. There are blows which a man must bear alone, and for hours after he had read Fay's letter, Guido sat in his private room, with doors locked to keep out intruders. No eye ever saw the words she wrote and no human being ever knew what he suffered in those hours of his sorrow. It would have been easier if she had died. She was alive, beautiful, loving, shut in behind the walls of a convent, praying, fasting, doing penance. Alas! the results were not such as Fay hoped and desired. Guido di Cassini was not drawn closer to the Church by this sacrifice; he was driven further away, embittered and angered at this needless loss of happiness for her and himself. For a short time the enthusiasm would keep her spirits at a high pitch of excitement. What then? What of the long, long years of monotony and deathly weariness? She was young and he was young; they must grow old, each alone, because of this preposterous idea of sacrifice.

Was it any wonder that Guido left that room a different man, with a hardness in his character which had never been there before?

It is strange that one's life goes on, even in the midst of tragedy and suffering. Never does one so completely realize what an atom one is, how insignificant, as when a terrible grief comes, and the

THE JESUIT

world about us moves on steadily, gaily, just about as usual.

This experience came to Janet. She, her mother, and Guido were grieving for Fay. The tourists came and went the same as ever, flaunting their red Baedekers and discussing the ruins and galleries. Bells rang merrily and the sun rose in the morning and set gorgeously in the evening; but Fay was gone!

The marquis quietly informed his friends that the wedding would not take place. The news caused a whirlwind of gossip and excitement in social circles. Whispers were exchanged over afternoon cups of tea and Roman matrons nodded their heads wisely at each other and affirmed that they had never believed that the marriage would occur. It was a blind infatuation of Guido's for the American girl and he would soon recover from the disappointment.

Whether Guido recovered, the world of Rome never knew. When he made his next appearance among his acquaintances they observed that his mouth was more stern than it had been and that his dark hair was slightly streaked with gray. There was no further sign that he had suffered when his hopes of joy and happiness were blasted. He was just as courteous, just as kindly as ever, but he soon became known as a bitter, almost unreasonable, opponent of the Clerical party.

"It will not be necessary for you to complete the

work in my apartment," he said to the man who had charge of the renovations in the Cassini palace.

"The Signor Marchese does not wish to have the rooms finished?" inquired the man, surprised at the sudden order, although he, too, had heard how the beautiful American lady had chosen to enter a convent rather than live in a splendid palace and be a "grande dame" in Roman society. "A foolish freak!" he had said to himself that very morning, as he walked through the spacious salons. "Bury herself in a convent, devote her life to prayers behind closed doors, when she might have enjoyed all this grandeur! My own opinion is that there is some priest behind it—and money." He winked at himself in one of the Venetian mirrors. There were many in Rome who had expressed, or perhaps thought, the same thing.

"You heard what I said," replied the marquis, a little sharply. He had almost reached the limit of his self-control.

"The Signor Marchese's wishes shall be obeyed," was the response, but the man's sharp eyes rested inquisitively on the face of his employer. "He's pretty badly cut up," was his mental observation.

Within an hour, the army of workmen had retired, the sound of hammering had ceased, the rooms were silent and deserted.

That afternoon Guido entered the apartment for the last time in his life. As the only son and head of the family, he was absolute master of the prop-

erty. This apartment was his to control. It should be closed, exactly as it was, half-finished, only partially ready for the bride who would never come into it.

If Fay had consented to be married in May, as he desired, he would have taken her away to his castle perched high upon a mountain in the picturesque Abruzzi. In the autumn this work would have been completed and Fay could have added those touches which a refined, cultured woman knows how to give to a home.

His face hardened as he continued his walk through the lonely rooms. Fay's boudoir was more nearly finished than the salons. He entered it and sat down. The walls were hung with silk of pale rose-tint. The ceiling had been newly frescoed with Watteau scenes. The furniture had been chosen by Fay, in the style of Louis XIV, white and gold.

Here, there was no need for self-control. He sank down on his knees, buried his face in his hands and sobs, those of a man who seldom weeps, shook him violently from head to foot.

The shadows grew deeper, and the little boudoir was filled with the soft, gray light of early evening.

Guido left the apartment, went to his library and rang the bell sharply.

"Send me the steward," the master commanded, when the servant came.

To the steward he gave his orders concisely and clearly.

THE JESUIT

"You will close all the windows in my apartment in the 'piano nobile,' lock the doors, and bring me the keys."

With a respectful bow and sympathetic look, the steward retired. There were few kind words for Fay spoken in the lower part of the palace, where the servants lived and talked over freely the affairs of the family with whom some of them had been associated for many years. They had known the marquis since he was an infant and they loved and pitied him. The condemnation of Fay was not necessarily because she had gone into a convent. "Who knows? she may have had a vocation," some of the women said. The general opinion was that if she had a vocation, she should have found it out before and not allowed the marquis to think that she would marry him.

That evening Guido received the keys from the steward, and locked them up in a small drawer, where they remained untouched.

Guido did not blame Fay for the step which she had taken. There was not one bitter thought of her in his mind. Neither did he nourish the least hope that she would repent her decision before it was too late and leave the convent to come back to him. He had been born into the Roman Catholic faith. He was an Italian and he knew better than Janet or her mother, or even than Sir John, that Fay's fate was inexorably sealed. The web had been woven firmly, her conscience and soul were bound

THE JESUIT

in its strands, drawn so slowly, so softly around her, that she had scarcely felt them.

The marquis cursed her fortune and wished that she had been a dowerless bride. He blamed Father Veroni, whom he suspected of having persuaded his mother to devote his young sister's life to a convent, and now, of having influenced Fay to separate herself from the world.

"I will go to him myself," he resolved, but he delayed from day to day. Courageous as he was, he hesitated to face Father Veroni, who had been his father's friend and his mother's lifelong adviser.

He delayed so long that the Consistory had been held at the Vatican and Father Veroni was no longer a humble priest. He had assumed the cardinal's hat, was a member of the Curia, the College of Cardinals, and the great and noble bowed before him and kissed his hand in reverence.

There were times when the marquis feared to go to the cardinal lest he should be brutally frank and anger the prelate and defeat his own ends thereby. He clinched his hands when he thought of Floria. She had not yet taken the veil, but would do so in the "month of Mary," then just beginning, the month when roses bloomed in joyous abandon and all life was meant to be gay and merry. They would shut his little sister in the convent, simply because of a foolish vow his mother had made years before! How far did a mother's rights extend? Fay was lost to him. Perhaps he could save Floria. He

would exert his authority in his own household. Then he thought of his mother and doubts of his ability to force her to change her decision assailed him. He would wait still a few days and think the matter over.



CHAPTER XXII

ALTHOUGH Cardinal Veroni had assumed his new honors only a short time before a certain May morning, he wore them with dignity and a sense of his exalted position. Not having, as yet, secured an apartment worthy of his rank as a Prince of the Church, he continued to occupy his old home. It does not take long for the public to realize the fact that a priest has been made a cardinal. *Father Veroni* had received many visitors and transacted much business, but *Cardinal Veroni* discovered that a host of people desired to know him and wanted favors conferred upon them.

His small antechamber was occupied by at least ten persons when the young man whom he had hired as his secretary came into the room and informed those who were waiting that his eminence would now receive them. They entered the cardinal's presence in the order of their arrival.

The tenth person was a young man who grew very impatient for his turn to come.

"Did you tell his eminence that I have a letter for him from Cardinal Perotti?" he inquired sharply of the secretary.

"I did. He says that he regrets to keep you waiting, but he must first see those who arrived previous to you."

Enrico Gardi bit his lip. *Father* Veroni would not have thought it the part of wisdom to send such a message to him. It was different, now that he was a cardinal.

It seemed to him that the man had changed with his status in the Church. He was more dignified, more cold and reserved in manner, and received the secretary of his colleague with very little show of cordiality. *Father* Veroni had never liked Signor Gardi. He considered him a presuming, conceited young man, and could not understand why Cardinal Perotti kept him in his service. It was an excellent thing to have a secretary who was trustworthy, faithful, obedient and silent. Cardinal Veroni was convinced that Gardi worked in his own interests, did not possess the qualities mentioned, knew entirely too much, and listened at keyholes with too great assiduity. He disliked him accordingly.

"I bring a letter for your Eminence," began Gardi.

"Kindly give it to me."

The cardinal read the letter, wrote a few words in reply and handed the note to Signor Gardi. Evidently, he considered the audience at an end.

"Did you wish something else?" he inquired, when the secretary made no movement toward leaving.

"May I speak to your Eminence on a subject which is of importance?"

"You may."

THE JESUIT

"I have learned a few facts with regard to an ex-priest named Paolo Gregori."

Cardinal Veroni picked up a mother-of-pearl paper-cutter and amused himself by trying its sharpness on some envelopes.

"I am aware that your Eminence has a special interest in this young man; it is considered to be an unusual affection on the part of an eminent cardinal," continued Gardi, losing control of his judgment in his desire to arouse the prelate, "and I ventured to come and make a report."

The cardinal's eyes were lowered to the paper-cutter, or Gardi would have been warned by the steely glitter in them of a necessity for prudence.

"He has tried everywhere to get work and has failed. Why? Because *I* have interfered. I have followed him into each new place of employment and informed the proprietor that he was an ex-priest. If he was employed, it was at a great risk, for both Cardinal Perotti and Cardinal Veroni would use their influence against him."

"It is evident that you were not trained in a Jesuit College, Signor Gardi," said Cardinal Veroni with cold sarcasm, "or you would have learned to be more diplomatic." His voice grew stern. "How dared you use my name? Did I ever give you permission to hound a man to his ruin in my name? What interest have I in Paolo Gregori? You had courage, indeed, to come here and tell me this."

The secretary looked like a whipped puppy.

Even his waxed moustache drooped. He had expected approbation, and perhaps a handsome present for his valuable services, and he received hard words.

"Decidedly, your line of business, Signor Gardi, is not that of an avenger, or even, I may add, of a gentleman," continued the clear voice of the cardinal. "I will bid you good morning."

Enrico Gardi slunk out of the room, much subdued in spirit. He had thought to meet an intriguer of his own type, the spying, listening, whispering man, who loved small revenges and paid well for information. He had mistaken his man. Had the cardinal's secretary been shrewd enough, he would have realized that he had met an ecclesiastical diplomat far more skilled than he, who manipulated large schemes and did not stoop to persecute or drive an ex-priest out of a situation. Sir John was right; Cardinal Veroni had nothing to do with the unsuccessful attempts of Paolo Gregori to earn an honest living. The day might come when he could interfere with the plans of the Protestants in regard to the former priest, but it would be accomplished in a far different manner.

Nevertheless, the knowledge that Paolo was not finding his road smooth was slightly satisfactory to him, for he had sincerely regretted the action which the young and successful priest had taken.

His eminence was smiling when his next visitor entered, but the smile faded when he saw who it

THE JESUIT

was. The one person whom he had wished to avoid since Easter was Janet Lapeer, and now he was face to face with her. He rose to his feet and held out his hand to her.

"Miss Lapeer, this is an unexpected favor. Will you please take a seat?"

Janet sat down, too weak and nervous to remain standing. She had hesitated a long time before coming to the cardinal, but she felt that, at any cost, she must find out where Fay was. The suspense was wearing on her nerves. As she had expected, the news brought to her mother a serious illness, and the doctors advised removing her from the scenes which were so closely connected with Fay. Very soon they were to go to Frascati, a beautiful town on the slope of the mountains near Rome. Mrs. Lapeer absolutely refused to go any further away.

At first, Janet had thought of asking Lady Eger what she knew about Fay, but this had been impossible. Day and night nurses were now required to care for the sick woman, who could scarcely speak above a whisper. She must not be disturbed or agitated; it might cause her death.

There was no one else to whom she could go, except to Cardinal Veroni. At the convent where Fay had passed the two weeks before Easter, she could not obtain any information. They knew nothing about Miss Fay Lapeer.

So she had come to the cardinal and her eyes

THE JESUIT

appealed to him like those of a child. When he met her glance he turned his own away.

Strange to say, in spite of her obduracy, Cardinal Veroni respected Janet very highly. She was a Protestant with straight-laced views, a woman who had utterly refused to yield to the fascination of brilliant functions with music beautiful enough for angel choirs, yet he admired her as he had never admired Fay. It was one of the contradictions of human nature, and Cardinal Veroni was still human.

He was a man who observed details and saw that she was plainly dressed in gray, a color peculiarly becoming to her. Janet had felt, when Fay left them, as a woman does when death takes from her one whom she holds precious—she had wished to enshroud herself in black, but on her mother's account she did not do so.

"It is the face of a Madonna," thought the cardinal, noting critically the oval form of her face, the delicate features and fine expression, the tender eyes and pathetic droop of the mouth, a mute appeal to his kindness and gentleness. Again the thought came to him: "What an abbess she would make!"

"Where is my sister?" she asked, abruptly.

"You will believe me when I tell you that I do not know?" he said, interrogatively.

She shook her head, and the cardinal's pale face was flooded with a rush of color. Never in his long career had he felt so keenly the humiliation of not being believed.

"Where is my sister?" she repeated. Her voice was now full and strong. "Where have you hidden her from us?"

The cardinal faced her bravely.

"Look me in the eyes, Miss Lapeer. I am not lying when I tell you that I do not know where your sister is. I knew that she did not return to the pension, but where she went, believe me, I do not know."

With a cry of despair Janet clasped her hands together, as if she were suffering. "Then you cannot give me any information about her?"

"No, Miss Lapeer."

"Someone must know where she is. She could not have made so serious a decision without consulting someone. Didn't you know of her intention?" Janet was too much in earnest to remember the titles which it was customary to use in addressing the cardinal. To her, he was a plain man, from whom she desired information.

"I did."

"She told you she was going to leave us, to enter a convent, to give up the man she loved, never to see us, never to write to us. It would be easier for us if she were dead."

The flush had faded from the cardinal's face now. It looked gray and drawn. Rarely had he been so moved from his cold self-control. Sophistry no longer availed him. To Janet he must be frank and open.

"I knew all about it, Miss Lapeer."

"But you did not think it necessary to inform her mother, her natural guardian?"

"No."

If deep contempt could be expressed on Janet's gentle countenance, it was there now. She would appeal no longer to this man who had no heart.

"Good morning," she said.

"One moment, Miss Lapeer. I knew of your sister's intentions, but I do not know where she is. It may seem incredible to you, but it is true. Do you believe me?"

"Yes, Father Veroni, I believe you."

She was gone, and the cardinal sat down wearily by his desk. It was odd, but he had been very anxious that she should believe his word. He could not lie to Janet Lapeer. That was the *man*, Pietro Veroni; the Jesuit training soon came to the surface again. It was true, he did not know where Fay Lapeer was. He was ignorant of the name of the convent where she had gone, although it would not be difficult for him to ascertain it. He did not know it, because he had been certain that, sooner or later, Janet would ask him, and he did not want to tell her.

Cardinal Veroni was having a strenuous morning. It was trying to his nerves, especially when he saw that his next visitor was the Marquis di Cassini, who, by some strange coincidence, had come on the same morning as Janet.

THE JESUIT

"I will be patient and not abusive," Guido resolved, following the secretary into his eminence's presence.

He stooped to kiss the cardinal's hand and was immediately conscious of an icy atmosphere surrounding him.

Cardinal Veroni placed the tips of his fingers together, a favorite position when he was annoyed and waited for his guest to speak. He was getting tired and felt irritable. First, he had been obliged to think of Paolo Gregori, always a subject of annoyance; then, Janet had looked at him with her clear, true eyes, and now, he must be troubled by questions from the marquis, who would not be so easy to answer as the simple-hearted American girl.

Guido's courage increased, now that he was in the presence of this man who could decide destinies with indifference. He became desperate and reckless.

"Where have you put her?" he blurted out, forgetting all his resolutions to be calm and self-composed.

"Of whom art thou speaking?" inquired the cardinal.

"Of Miss Fay Lepeer, who was to have been my wife. How dared you take her from me? How dared you interfere between a man and the woman he loves? Could you not have taken her money, a paltry fortune, and left her to be happy, to enjoy her young life, instead of saddening her whole exist-

ence and wrecking the joy of her mother and sister, as well as my own? You are cruel, unfeeling—”

The marquis had entirely forgotten the paths of prudence; he had thrown wisdom to the winds. Coming with a desire to placate rather than offend, he had forgotten everything but his lost love, and that the man sitting there so calmly was, to a large degree, responsible for his misfortune.

“Art thou mad, Guido Cassini?” interrupted the cardinal’s stern voice. “I am thy mother’s friend, as I was that of thy father. Why dost thou come here to insult me in my own home?”

The cardinal had not lost his power over men, and Guido realized suddenly that in his presence he was only a youth, impertinent, and self-willed.

“Miss Fay Lapeer decided entirely on her own responsibility that the pleasures of the world would be temptations to draw her away from a religious life. She had other reasons, which she wrote to thee, no doubt.”

The marquis bowed.

“It was her special desire that neither her family or thyself should know where she is. It would be less painful for thee and for her. I, myself, do not know to which convent she went.”

Guido shrugged his shoulders very slightly, and the cardinal proceeded, apparently without noticing the movement: “Will it make the sorrow—for I know that it is a sorrow, Guido—any lighter, if I assure thee that she is very happy, very contented,

and that her heart's desire is that thou wilt devote thy interests to that Church to which thou belongest and to which she has given her life?"

"Can your Eminence expect that result, after what has occurred? No, from this time on, I will use my energies in frustrating the plans of the Clerical party."

"It will succeed without thy help, then. Thou art making a mistake, Guido. Thou didst not truly love this woman, if thou canst not yield to her prayers and desires."

The marquis looked squarely into the face of the cardinal.

"Your Eminence knows that what you say is not true. But my conscience does not belong to Fay, or to you, or to the Church. It is mine, and, so help me God, I will follow it."

"We cannot understand each other and it is better to terminate this very unpleasant interview."

"One moment, Eminenza," said Guido, for the first time remembering what the chief object of his visit had been. "In a week, my sister Floria is to take the veil, I believe. As head of our family, I oppose it. It must not be."

The cardinal's smile was inscrutable and unpleasant. He pressed an electric button at the side of his desk.

"This is a matter in which thy mother is deeply interested. Speak to her about it. If she decides to break her vow and allow Floria to leave the convent,

she must be responsible, not I. Call the carriage of Marquis di Cassini," he said to the servant.

The secretary entered the room.

"There are no more visitors, Eminenza. Have you any further commands?"

"None. I wish to be alone."

The newly-made cardinal passed his hand over his forehead and eyes as if he were extremely weary. It had been, indeed, a very strenuous morning.

A week later, when the convent gardens were gorgeous with a wealth of red and yellow roses, when the chapel windows were jeweled in rich color by the sunshine from without, in God's free world, a shaft of golden light penetrated the figure of a dove, pictured on the glass over the altar and fell upon Floria di Cassini, who knelt there.

Her mother and sisters were present in the chapel. They wept a little, but only a little, because they had never known Floria well; she had been with the nuns almost all the time since she was a child, in order that she might be prepared for her vocation, or perhaps that she might not know the world and long vainly for it. The mother knelt on the hard pavement and felt virtuous. She had requited to the Madonna the blessing of health conferred upon her years before. She had given up her daughter, and she trusted that it would be counted to her for righteousness.

Guido was not present. The conversation with

THE JESUIT

his mother had been stormy and worse than useless. She could not break her vow without losing her soul. Besides, if Fay, the American girl, whom he had wished to marry, and of whom she had never approved until she showed her good sense and entered a convent, leaving him free, she hoped, to make a more suitable alliance, had chosen to devote her life to prayer and fasting, there could be no great hardship in it.

He left the room without replying. On this fine spring day, when Floria took her irrevocable vows, he drove furiously, madly, across the Campagna to his villa in the Alban Hills. There he spent the day, longing for the two women who were so dear to him and whom he would never see again.



CHAPTER XXIII

"CAN you come? Hortense is much worse."

This was the telegram sent by Sir John to Janet three weeks after she and her mother reached Frascati. Very soon after receiving it she was seated in the electric train, riding rapidly down the steep hill-sides, between olive groves and vineyards, and then hurrying across the Campagna, treeless, bare, and blazing with summer heat.

The long-horned white cattle, grazing in the fields near the ruins of the ancient aqueducts, raised their massive heads as the train whizzed by. The summer was so far advanced in this southern land that there were no more blossoms, the grass was already brown with drought and much sunshine. Sheep were gathered together in dull brown masses here and there, and the shepherds sat near them, vainly endeavoring to shelter themselves from the burning heat.

Even then Janet felt the charm of the landscape, the fascination of the city into whose gate, through the Aurelian Wall, the train was now entering. Notwithstanding the fact that it was here that the most intense suffering she had ever experienced had come to her, she loved Rome, as all do who spend much time within her walls. It seemed to her as if she would be willing to pass her entire life here, in

this wonderful city, especially now that Fay was there—somewhere. O, the agony of uncertainty! If she might only know where her sister was! It would be some relief to her anxiety.

The streets of Rome were quite deserted at this hour, and the pavements reflected a dazzling light which was unbearable. The cool entrance hall of the Pension Speranza, shaded with green Venetian blinds, decorated with fresh green plants, seemed dark to Janet at first, and it was only after a few moments that she distinguished Sir John's familiar face. Familiar, yet so grief-stricken that she dared not inquire for Lady Eger.

"She is still living," he said, answering the unspoken question, "but very much changed. Are you willing to go to see her?"

"Immediately," she replied.

With his usual thoughtfulness, Sir John had ordered tea for her, and he insisted upon her drinking two cups of it in the pleasant winter garden. He said little, resting his head wearily on the back of the rattan chair, and often closing his eyes as if in pain. At that moment Janet felt for the first time since she had known Sir John that he was weaker than she was and needed her help.

"You have finished? Then we will go."

Janet followed Sir John into the sick chamber. Greatly changed, indeed, was Lady Eger, since that September day when they had gone together to Saint Peter's Church, and the English lady had

THE JESUIT

reverently kissed the black marble toe of the statue. The invalid was still conscious and looked at Janet, when she entered, with a glance of recognition.

"It is Miss Lapeer, Hortense. You wished to see her. She has been asking for you, Miss Lapeer. Will you be so kind as to come here by her side? She is very weak. Poor Hortense!"

The big, strong brother put his arms around her light form and raised her higher on the pillows. She thanked him with a grateful look.

The nun came forward to give her patient some medicine, and then, at a sign from Sir John, left the room.

Either Janet's entrance had excited Lady Eger or the medicine had a stimulating effect, for she began to speak, pausing occasionally to gain strength.

"I—wanted to see you—Janet—for I am—dying. When we are near—to—eternity—we see our faults—and our sins—of the past—more clearly. Your sister—"

She was seized with a violent attack of coughing, succeeded by exhaustion from which it seemed impossible for her to rally.

"Do not try to talk, dear Lady Eger," Janet protested, but her heart beat fast with anxiety and a ray of hope. Perhaps Lady Eger could tell her where Fay was!

Again the dying woman made an effort to speak.

"Your sister—it was my fault—that—she went to—the convent. I—meant—to do—right. I—see

now that—I did—wrong—to
—and—forgive me—if yo
forgive!”

She was going, surely going
out revealing the precious sec

Janet bent over her in an a
Sir John once more raised his
she might breathe more easily

“Hortense,” he whispered,
Lapeer is.”

In a few broken words, Lad
of a well-known convent for c

Janet took the poor, waste
strong ones.

“Do not grieve, Lady E
freely. It was not you, but
wrong and sinned against Fay

Lady Eger’s eyes shone with

“I—may—be able—to—to
feebly.

The nun again entered the r
Cardinal Veroni and a priest.
hands with Sir John, bowed to
words to Lady Eger, and prep
istration of the last sacrament.

Sir John kissed his sister’s
he and Janet left the room whil
the last offices of that Church
chosen to belong and in whose
fluenced Fay Lapeer to enter t

THE JESUIT

"You will not leave me?" Sir John said, with such a piteous appeal that Janet yielded. "You will stay with Hortense and me?"

"I will stay. But first, I must telephone to mamma. She would be greatly worried if I did not return."

The light of the long summer day faded into darkness. Myriad stars appeared in the cloudless sky, and, later, the moon rose in full splendor. From the streets there came sounds of laughter and gay voices. Mandolin players touched their instruments lightly and brought forth tinkling, rippling melodies.

Still, the invalid retained her slender grasp on life, and Sir John and Janet watched by her side.

The early dawn began to break over Rome. Silvery mists hovered over the dome of Saint Peter's, and finally vanished as the sun arose.

Lady Eger stirred and spoke: "O, John, I—see—my—baby!"

There was an ineffable joy in her tone, the realization of a long and hopeless craving. Her face was transfigured, and she stretched out her arms to clasp that for which her whole being longed.

Sir John sobbed aloud. Janet placed her hand on his shoulder to comfort him.

There was a moment of silence. Lady Eger's arms fell, helpless, upon the bed. Her dark eyes closed, then opened once more. She was back, now, in the days of her childhood, by her mother's knee.

THE JESUIT

The intervening years had vanished from her memory.

Clearly, sweetly, her voice was audible in the stillness:

“Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,
Look upon a little child—
A—little—child—”

Lady Eger was dead.

CHAPTER XXIV

AFTER Lady Eger's death Janet wrote to Cardinal Veroni—she had not the courage to call on him again—telling him that she had learned the name of the convent where Fay was, and asking him, as a last favor, to obtain for her permission to see her sister. It cost Janet a great deal to be forced to appeal for help to one whom she regarded as their enemy.

The reply from the cardinal was not long delayed. It had been extremely difficult, even for him, to get permission for the desired interview. When that was secured Fay herself objected, on the ground that the result would be unsatisfactory and would cause pain to them both. She was well and happy. That was all. Cardinal Veroni regretted that he could not do more for one whom he respected so highly as he did Miss Lapeer.

If Janet had had a different nature, if she had been critical and satirical, she might have been tempted to think after this fashion: Fay was happy and did not want to be disturbed in her spiritual life. But what of the mother, whose health was ruined by the sudden blow, of Janet herself, in her loneliness, of the man whose happiness had been wrecked? Did Fay give them no thought? Could there be a selfishness in religion?

THE JESUIT

Janet's heart was not bitter but loving. She wept sadly when the cardinal's note came, and she prayed to God for Fay, and for them all, that he would give each of them the needed strength to live and to endure.

When Sir John came to Frascati and, finding her in the olive grove near the hotel, took both her hands in his and looked into her eyes, there was no need of words between them. She knew that she had loved him for a long time and that he would love her through eternity.

The sunshine sifted through the lacy, light-green leaves of the olive trees and rested on her hair, turning it to threads of gold; it flickered over her gown and wove mystic designs upon it and it touched her face and eyes, and glorified them.

These two talked for a long time in the olive grove, and it seemed as if they had found each other only to separate. Janet was certain that her mother, now practically a nervous invalid, would never wish to leave Rome. Here, she could know and feel that she was near Fay, even if it were evermore impossible to see her.

Mrs. Lapeer, when she heard from Sir John that he desired to marry Janet, surprised them both. Awakening from the apathy into which she had fallen since Fay left them, she insisted that there should be no delay; arrangements for the marriage should be made at once. She was feverishly anxious that one of her daughters should be happy. She would

THE JESUIT

go anywhere, do anything that Janet wished, provided that once a year they could return to Rome, to be near Fay.

On account of the complicated legal documents required for a marriage in Italy, it was decided to defer the ceremony until autumn. Mrs. Lapeer and Janet sailed from Naples, and Sir John went to England to attend to business matters there. Part of Lady Eger's property had been left to him, the other part going, by her wish, to the Roman Catholic Church. It was to be used in founding an institution for abandoned children, and the funds were to be administered by Cardinal Veroni, who had full authority to use his own judgment.

In October, Janet and Sir John were married very quietly in her mother's home in Clyde.

The fact that Fay Lapeer had changed her faith and entered a convent on the eve of her marriage with a wealthy Italian marquis had caused much excitement among her friends in that town. The wedding of Janet Lapeer and an English baronet, added fuel to the fire. The newspapers gave as many details as they could find out or invent. It was a relief to Sir John and Janet when they could escape to the ranch in California.

Sir John's property comprised many thousands of acres of land, suitable for fruit-raising. To the hundreds of workmen whom he employed he was not a baronet but plain John Hamilton. With this he was quite content, being a democrat at heart,

and a simple-minded nobleman who loved all human kind as brothers.

It would have pleased the ambitious soul of Mrs. Lapeer to hear her daughter, Janet, called Lady Hamilton, and it would have gratified her even more if Sir John had chosen to live on his ancestral estates in England, rather than in California, where he gloried in the freedom of life and thought. In the meantime the "ancestral estates" were well cared for, and Sir John expected to return to England occasionally, to give them his personal supervision. Janet was satisfied to be known as "Mrs. John Hamilton," by the few neighbors who lived on ranches several miles away, and was very happy in her new home, except when she thought of Fay, dear Fay, far off in Rome.

Sir John's house was large, having many rooms, furnished with every comfort. It was on the broad verandas, however, that Mrs. Lapeer and Janet spent most of their time. On this bright morning, the breakfast table was set out in the open air. Its fine white linen, with dainty china and rare old silver, heirlooms in the Hamilton family for many years, made it very attractive to Sir John, coming in from the orchards. A vase of roses stood in the center of the table and roses clambered in wild luxury over the veranda, drooping gaily from the roof and winding themselves around the pillars.

Janet gathered a bunch of them before she sat down, fastening them on her white dress.

THE JESUIT

"Your mother is not coming down?" asked her husband.

"She is tired. I have sent her breakfast to her. Here comes Frank, with the mail. I will pour your coffee while you open the bag."

"Always in a hurry for your letters!" he said, teasingly.

He became absorbed in his mail, and Janet patiently waited, glancing occasionally at the glimpses of rolling country, with masses of blossoming trees, a huge flower garden, which she could see between the pillars and vines. Even the southern climate of Italy could not produce such riotous abundance of beauty.

Sir John was unusually grave when he lifted his face from a copy of the London Times and stretched out his hand for a cup of coffee.

"Is anything the matter, John?" inquired Janet, quick to notice a change in his face. She grew suddenly very pale. "Is it—Fay?"

"No, dear, no. There is a bit of news here in which you will be interested, but it does not concern us personally. It can wait."

"And are there no letters for me?"

"One from Mrs. Pierce, I think." He made no move to give it to her, and she ate her breakfast with little appetite.

There certainly must be something serious in that paper, or John would not be so quiet, so absorbed in his thoughts. He had been very cheer-



“ ‘My husband saw the marquis yesterday. He is almost broken-hearted, but brave, as ever.

“ ‘When are you coming to Rome, Janet? We want to see you. There is so much to talk about.’ ”

“It is a very terrible thing,” said Sir John, “but do not think about it, Janet.”

“John,” she said, “when can we go to Rome?”

“When you like, my dear. I can leave now as well as any time.”

“I want to go soon. When I think of Fay, I get desperate. At least, I should like to be near her for a while.”

Thus it happened that Sir John, Janet, Mrs. Lapeer, and faithful Romilda, who had accompanied them across ocean and continent to the California home, made their first pilgrimage back to Rome.

The old city was the same; it had not changed. Tourists were on the streets, the ruins were flooded with sunshine, veiled in filmy mists or white in the moonlight, just as they had been a year before. Hundreds of priests walked the broad avenues, and odors of incense floated out from the open doors of the churches.

Cardinal Veroni was not in Rome, a man-servant told Sir John, when he called at the new home of his eminence.

“When will he be back?”

“I do not know, sir. He has gone to Spain on an important mission. The date of his return has not yet been fixed.”

No information about Fay could be obtained from Cardinal Veroni. Janet and her mother must continue to be patient. Ah! it was hard—hard.

Mrs. Pierce was delighted to see Janet again and poured out a quantity of news.

"It is all true about poor Floria. She is at rest, and her brother bears it wonderfully. Paolo Gregori, you remember the young priest, Janet?"

"Very well."

"He is preaching now and winning many souls to Christ. You remember what a hard time he had at first. It was impossible for him to stay in any position. We all admired his courage so much. He never complained, although I really think that there were days when he had nothing to eat."

Sir John began to pace the room, an old habit of his, which betokened mental disturbance.

"I would have advanced him money," he said, impatiently, as if someone was to blame. "Nothing to eat! Poor lad!"

Mrs. Pierce smiled.

"We did not allow him to suffer, Sir John, but we had to beguile him in for a meal. He would not tell us of his troubles. At last, the Marquis di Cassini found him a place as tutor in the family of a wealthy Deputy. The person who had seemed to persecute him suddenly stopped. Now, he is studying theology and commencing to preach."

"Any news of Cardinal Veroni?" inquired Sir John. His honest face had cleared once more.

THE JESUIT

"Cardinal Veroni will be a great cardinal, as he was great in his priestly profession. He has a wonderful power over men," said Mr. Pierce. "I saw him not long ago, and he seemed to me paler and sterner than ever. He is now in Spain."

"So I understand. Janet, are you ready? Let us go, for tomorrow is Sunday and it will be a hard day for you."

The morrow was a hard day, for it was the center and heart of this sad pilgrimage to Rome.

Although the nuns in the convent which Fay had chosen to enter were not allowed to leave the building, they attended mass each Sunday morning in a church, which was open to the public, but had a special entrance on the other side, into the convent. As they sat in the gallery, thick lattice-work hid them from the curious gaze of the worshipers. A shimmer of white shone through the close iron grating; that was the only sign of their presence. Silently they entered, knelt in silent prayer, and silently left the gallery when the mass was finished.

Janet and her husband went to that church on Sunday morning. It was a comfort even to catch the gleam of white robes through the lattice work. Perhaps Fay was there, living, praying! So close, and yet separated as completely from her sister as if an ocean rolled between them.

At sunset, they went again. This time, Mrs. Lapeer gathered up her strength and accompanied them; for this was an important and final part of

their pilgrimage. Once each year, they would come to this little church at eventime, when the light grew dim and the sweet voices of the nuns sang with a melody which was little less than heavenly.

Hand in hand, Janet and her mother sat on the hard, wooden bench and listened to the invisible choir. One voice was clearer, purer than the others. It might be Fay, pouring out her soul in the music! Did it mean peace or sorrow? For her sake, Janet prayed that it might mean peace.

Had she forgotten them, her mother and sister, who had loved her so dearly and cared for her so tenderly? In the secluded life that she was leading, separated from those duties which God had placed before her, and which she had, of her own free will, refused to perform, was she happy and contented, or was she restless, like a bird beating its wings against the iron bars of its cage?

Who could tell! Behind that lattice work, within the walls of the convent, there were soul-mysteries which only God could solve.

The voices rose higher and higher, richer and fuller, in a grand burst of melody; then died away into silence.

Darkness shrouded the little church; the few candles on the altar burned with greater brilliancy in front of the painting of our Lord's mother.

Sir John assisted Mrs. Lapeer down the stone steps and into the carriage. As he was following Janet, to take his seat opposite the ladies, he caught

THE JESUIT

sight of a familiar face. It was the Marquis Cassini. Every Sunday evening, when he came to this old church and listened to the singing of the nuns. Motionless in the shadows, he sat, hoping that he might hear Fay's voice, and that life a little easier to feel that, possibly, the woman he loved.

The sight of the marquis and his stained face aroused good Sir John's exasperation. How could this man, father from mother, of sister from brother, husband, be right before God?

Each year the pilgrims came to this place as long as Fay stood in the semidarkness, listening. They could not come to the altar, divided by a gulf as wide as the sea.

The nuns sing or pray, and are crowded with pilgrims, and hear the confessions of the dying.

Rome, the Eternal City, the City of Cæsars, her Father's blood of martyrdom, her faith, and her apostle, who has done so much for her. And whose steel.





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